

RICK AND RUDDY IN CAMP



HOWARD R. GARIS



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“Look! Look! The face of fire!”

—Page 94

RICK AND RUDDY IN CAMP

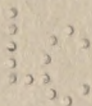
The Adventures of a Boy and His Dog

BY

HOWARD R. GARIS

Author of "Rick and Ruddy," "Uncle Wiggily
Bedtime Stories," etc.

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RICK AND RUDDY SERIES

BY HOWARD R. GABIS

RICK AND RUDDY

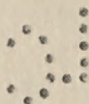
A Boy and His Dog

RICK AND RUDDY IN CAMP

Adventures of a Boy and His Dog

RICK AND RUDDY AFLOAT

Cruise of a Boy and His Dog



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Rick and Ruddy in Camp

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RICK AND RUDDY IN CAMP

CHAPTER I

THE STRANGE GIRL

“**R**UDDY! Ruddy! Come back here!
Where are you going, sir?”

The boy stood at the intersection of two streets. The dog, a beautiful, reddish-brown setter, was half way down the block, standing and looking back at the boy, with one paw raised as though making a “point.” Ruddy waved his plumed tail in friendly fashion to show there were no hard feelings on his part because he had run away.

“Ruddy, come back here!” cried Rick Dalton, more sternly now.

But the red setter, with a bark half of jolly defiance and half of begging entreaty, ran along by himself.

“I guess he knows Mrs. Jackson has a bone for him,” said Rick to himself, laughing a little as he saw his dog turn several times and look back, as if either asking his master to follow, or else to beg pardon for deserting. “I ought to make Ruddy mind, and come back when I call him,” said Rick, half aloud to himself as he walked slowly on, shifting from one arm to the other the bag of sugar he was bringing from the store.

“But I just can’t punish Ruddy! I can’t do it even if some folks say a dog ought to be made to mind. I couldn’t hit Ruddy—ever!”

He looked down the street. The setter was nearly out of sight now, but Rick’s sharp eyes caught frequent glimpses of his pet, chum and almost constant companion. The dog had stopped again, after sniffing at a tree, and was once more gazing toward his boy master.

“Oh, go on if you want to!” called Rick with a laugh. “Might as well let you have your way, I s’pose; though Doc. Wilder says I’m spoiling you. I reckon setter dogs were just made to be spoiled,” mused Rick, as he resumed his way toward home.

And in a sense he was right. There is no dog

in the world so loving and lovable as a setter, and none quite so hard to train. They are so delightfully affectionate, wheedling and kind that one, naturally, dislikes to punish them. They are as ingratiating as an Irish fairy, than which there is nothing more teasing.

“Might as well try to make him come back, though,” thought Rick to himself, after a little farther forward progress. “I want to keep him as well trained as I can. But Ruddy isn’t supposed to be a trained dog—he’s just mine—a chum!”

Rick’s eyes gleamed with delight as he thought of his dog—the setter that had come to him about a year before out of the stormy sea. He was Rick’s dog, and Rick belonged to Ruddy. Boy and dog were ever together, except at such times as this, when Ruddy simply defied all rules and trotted off down the street by himself, to look for bones which many neighbors of the Dalton family saved for Rick’s pet, for Ruddy was a general favorite in the seacoast town of Belemere.

Suddenly Rick gave several shrill whistles. It was the signal to which Ruddy seldom failed to respond, but this time no reddish-brown dog

appeared racing up the street, his legs working like engine piston rods, to join his master. Ruddy, just then, was gnawing a bone in a yard, where, more than once, he had found similar treats, and he did not care to leave it now, when he must have known there was no special reason for it.

“Well, I guess he isn’t going to come back right away, and that’s all there is to it,” said Rick aloud, good-naturedly. “I’ll leave this sugar in the house and go after him, I reckon. I’ve got to make him mind—sometimes!” He added this last word as a sort of after-thought, to make up for his own lack of firmness in not better training his pet. But as Rick often said:

“You simply can’t whip Ruddy, once he looks straight at you!”

No one could, after a glance into those pleading, brown eyes, which asked forgiveness in such a tender manner.

So Rick started to enter his own yard, so intent on wondering what fun he and his dog could next find—what adventure might next summon them—that, for the moment, he was not aware of a strange girl standing in the middle of the walk, half way in from the gate.

As a matter of fact Rick collided with her before he knew she was there. The boy had turned, and was walking backward, his gaze fixed on the street, up which he thought Ruddy might come at any moment. And as he thus walked backward Rick was practicing a new way of whistling between his teeth—a trick Chot Benson had taught him.

“Ugh!” grunted Rick, the whistle coming to a sudden unmusical end in a grunt as he bumped against the girl.

“Oh!” she exclaimed, an odd, half-afraid tone in her voice. “Oh!”

Rick wheeled about suddenly and confronted the strange girl—strange in the sense that Rick had never seen her before. And yet there was something else remarkable about the girl, who was a little older than Rick’s sister Mazie.

“Oh, where am I? Can you—Oh, it’s all getting black again! I’m in the dark!” cried the girl, in a half-sobbing voice, and she covered her face with her hands and bowed her head. “In the dark!” she cried.

For a moment Rick was so startled that he nearly dropped the bag of sugar, which would have been a calamity, as Mazie was going to

make candy with part of it. However, he caught it just in time, and then turned his eyes toward the girl again. She raised her head, and took her hands from her face. Rick could see that there were tears on her cheeks.

“Oh—who are you? Where am I?” she asked, as if in a daze. “Will you please lead me out to the street. I—I must be in the wrong yard!”

“Wrong yard!” repeated the boy. “I should say so! Don’t you know where you are—honest?”

“Not exactly. I—that is we—live around here—somewhere!”

This also impressed Rick as being strange, for he had never seen the girl in that neighborhood before, and it was queer, if she lived nearby, that she didn’t know her way home—or even out of Rick’s yard.

“If you’ll please let me take your hand,” she said in a more steady voice, as she held out both hers, “and lead me to the gate, I can find my way—I think.”

A sudden idea came to the boy.

“Are you—er—that is, can’t you—*see?*” he asked in jerky fashion. “Are you—*blind?*”

He spoke the last word softly.

“Yes,” answered the girl, gently, “I can’t see very well, at times. This is one of those times. I guess you’ll have to lead me out of your yard. I didn’t mean to come in. It was a mistake.”

“Oh, that’s all right,” said Rick kindly. “If you’ll wait a minute, until I put this bag of sugar on the steps, I’ll lead you wherever you want to go.”

“It isn’t far, thank you,” responded the strange girl. “I just started out for a little walk, and when I found my eyes were going bad I turned in, thinking I was at my own house. We live next to the corner.”

“The brick house?” asked Rick, for that was the only residence near him that was to rent, and had been for some time.

“Yes, we only moved in yesterday—that is, our things did, and we just came—my brother and I. I started for the store, but now Jack will have to go.”

“That’s where I’ve been,” said Rick. “That’s where I got this sugar. I’ll put it on the steps.”

“You’d better bring it in the house, I think,”

suggested the girl. "Some one might take it."

"That's so," agreed Rick. "Then Mazie couldn't make her candy."

"Is Mazie your sister?"

"Yes. I won't be but a second," and Rick hurried into the kitchen, where his mother was busy at the sink, and Mazie, with a big apron on, was importantly stirring something in a brown bowl.

"Well, it's about time you came with that sugar, Richard Dalton!" cried his sister. "I've been waiting and waiting!"

"Couldn't help it! Ruddy ran away on me!" panted Rick. "Be back in a minute—there's a queer girl in our yard—she's blind—sometimes. I got to lead her out!"

He tossed the bag of sugar to the table and raced away, forgetting, as usual, to shut the door after him.

"Blind girl!" repeated Mazie.

"In our yard," added Mrs. Dalton.

Mazie and her mother stepped to the side porch and saw Rick leading out of the yard the strange girl, whose golden hair was being blown about her face by the summer wind.

"Who is she?" asked Mazie.

“Must be that new family that just moved in the brick house. But I didn’t know she was blind,” said Mrs. Dalton.

Meanwhile Rick led the stranger to the gate, which he swung open, holding it back so it would not slam shut against her.

“If you want to go to the store I can lead you there,” offered Rick, taking a firmer grip on the cool, slim hand of the sunny-haired girl.

“Thank you, I’d better go home, if you will lead me there,” she answered. “Maybe my eyes will get all right again in a few minutes, and——”

“Oh, I’ve got lots of time—now Mazie has her sugar!” interrupted Rick. He could not understand how a person could be partly blind at one time and not at another. This was something else strange about the strange girl. “I’ll take you home all right.”

“Thank you. My name is Ethel Slade,” she added.

“Mine’s Rick Dalton—Richard is my right name, but they all call me Rick,” said Ruddy’s master.

The girl stumbled a little as the boy led her down off the sidewalk, but he caught her arm

and steadied her, and led her along the street toward the brick house. Rick and his charge were almost at the gate when Ruddy came bounding out of the adjoining yard, his tail wildly awag and ready for whatever fun Rick might plan.

“Hi there, Ruddy!” called the boy. “You came back, did you?”

“Is that your brother—Ruddy?” asked the girl, turning her sightless eyes toward Rick.

“No, it’s my dog—Ruddy. Down!” he commanded, as Ruddy showed intentions of playfully leaping up and putting his paws on the shoulders of Ethel Slade. “Down!”

“Oh, I don’t mind! I love dogs!” she said, eagerly. “Please lead me to yours. I want to pat him!”

Ruddy was willing enough to make friends, but, as he was bounding toward Rick and the girl another boy came out of the yard of the brick house—a boy older than Rick.

With a bark of welcome—Ruddy was willing to make friends with every one—the setter leaped toward the strange boy. But the latter’s face showed no welcome. Instead he raised his

foot and, as Ruddy came near enough, kicked the dog savagely in the side.

“Get out, you red imp!” yelled the strange boy. “Don’t you try to bite me!”

“Ruddy doesn’t bite—ever!” cried Rick, hot anger surging into his heart. “And don’t you kick my dog again! Don’t you dare, you—you——!” he paused, his breath coming in gasps.

“I’ll kick him whenever I feel like it!” asserted the other lad with an angry sneer. “Let him keep away from me!”

Ruddy uttered a howl of pain, and ran toward Rick for comfort and sympathy. But as Rick dropped the hand of the blind girl, and sprang toward the boy who had kicked his dog, naturally Ruddy followed his master.

“Here he comes again! Get out!” yelled the lad from the brick house, and again he kicked poor Ruddy.

“Gosh darn you!” cried Rick, using his strongest expression. “I’ll fix you for that!”

He struck savagely at the older boy, and his fist landed full and fair on the other’s cheek. A red mark showed the place of the blow, and

an instant later Rick was knocked completely off his feet by a vicious left hander from the other lad.

“Hit me, will you!” yelled the older boy, and then he sprang toward the prostrate Rick and raised his foot to kick him.

“Jack! Jack Slade! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!” cried the girl, who now appeared able to see. “To kick a dog, and then kick a fellow when he’s down! Shame on you!”

Rick, hot with anger and struggling to get to his feet that he might bear his share in the fight he fully intended must follow, saw the girl leap for his opponent. She flung her arms around her brother and fairly dragged him back, away from Rick and Ruddy, though the girl appeared more slight and frail than the ugly boy.

“Let me get at him!” spluttered Jack Slade. “Let me——!”

“No! You shan’t! I’ll tell father! You—you brute!” she stormed, and there were tears in her voice as well as in her eyes.

“Why, she—she can see as well as anybody!” was the thought that flashed through Rick’s

mind as he saw the girl holding back her brother who was vainly struggling to reach him, while Ruddy barked menacingly. "What made her say she was blind, I wonder?"

CHAPTER II

RUDDY IS PUZZLED

RICK DALTON was not a fighting boy—that is, he did not go about with a chip on his shoulder. But no normal lad is going to submit tamely to having his dog kicked, and be knocked down himself—even after delivering a righteous blow. So with hot anger in his heart Rick struggled to his feet, and with clenched fists advanced toward Jack Slade, who was fast breaking away from the hold his sister Ethel had on him around the arms, pinning them to his side.

“Let go! Let go of me!” spluttered Jack. “If you don’t let me get at him, Ethel, I—I’ll kick you!”

“It would be just like you!” she said, a touch of scorn in her voice. “But you shan’t kick that dog again. I won’t let you!”

“And I won’t, either!” added Rick grimly, advancing toward his enemy.

“Huh! A lot you’ll do!” sneered Jack. “I’ll knock you down again!”

“Not so easy!” predicted Rick with a grin. He was now beginning to feel the first joy of a good fight.

“Let go, Ethel! Let go, I tell you, or I’ll kick you hard!” and the girl’s brother raised his foot for a backward blow against her legs as she stood close, holding him away from Rick.

With a sudden and strong effort Jack succeeded in forcing off his sister’s arm hold, and he sprang forward to battle with Rick, who, likewise, was in readiness. With a low growl, which boded no good to Jack Slade, Ruddy, the red setter, crouched—waiting.

And then, on the porch of the house appeared a stern-eyed and gray-haired man, who called out sharply:

“Jack, come here! How dare you fight! Come here at once! Ethel—where have you been? I’ve been worried about you. You might go too far away and——”

“I did, Daddy dear,” answered the strange girl, and her voice was cool and self-possessed.

“I got in the wrong yard and this boy—Rick Dalton—brought me home. Jack kicked his dog and——”

“The dog was going to bite me!” interrupted her brother.

“He was *not*—Ruddy never bites!” protested Rick.

“Well, anyhow, I thought he was,” grumbled Jack. “He hit me—this boy did—and I knocked him down——”

“And I held him back from kicking Rick when he was on the ground!” put in Ethel. “Didn’t I do right, Daddy?”

“Yes, but you should not have gone so far away, in a strange neighborhood, when you—you——”

“Yes, it did happen to me, Daddy,” said the girl, sadly. “I—I couldn’t see again, and—oh——”

She burst into tears as her father hurried out to clasp his arms around her.

“Go in the house at once, Jack!” ordered the stern man. “I’m sorry this happened,” said Mr. Slade to Rick. “Thank you for bringing my daughter home. It was a poor return for your hospitality, sir,” and he

bowed in courtly fashion, "to have your dog mistreated."

"Oh, that's all right," said Rick, good-naturedly, as he saw Jack turn aside with no further effort to renew the fight. "Maybe he did think Ruddy was going to nip him, but I never knew it to happen. Here, Ruddy!" he called to the setter, who seemed disposed to follow the girl and her father. She was leaning on the arm of the gray-haired man, and by the manner of her walk Rick realized that her footsteps were uncertain.

"She can't see again! That's funny," he mused, not meaning it in exactly that way, but, rather, that it was mysterious.

"I hate dogs!" muttered Jack Slade, as he turned aside, more because of compulsion on his father's part than because he had given over the idea of fighting. "If yours comes near me again I'll kick him harder," he added, but he took care that neither Ethel nor her father heard him utter this threat.

"You'd better not do it while I'm around," threatened Rick. "Come on, Ruddy," he called to his chum and companion. "Some folks are too mean to live," and Rick shot a glance at

Jack, who shook his fist angrily as he turned into the gate.

Rick had a glimpse of the stern, gray-haired but not old man leading the pretty, stumbling girl into the brick house.

“It sure is queer!” mused Rick. “How could she see to get hold of her brother from in back, and hold him from kicking me when I was down, and yet she can’t see to go in the house, and she couldn’t see to get out of our yard. It’s mighty strange!”

Musing on this mystery, Rick whistled to Ruddy as a final command to follow, which summons the dog obeyed. And then boy and dog took their homeward way, giving me a chance to inform my new readers something about Rick and Ruddy.

The pair need no introduction to those of you who have read the book entitled “Rick and Ruddy,” which precedes this. In that I told you how Rick, a lad living in the seacoast town of Belemere, in one of our eastern states, so wanted a dog that he prayed for one, though his sister Mazie had doubts as to whether or not this was right.

At any rate Rick prayed, and the next morn-

ing Ruddy, the red setter, was cowering on the Dalton doorsteps. He had come to Rick out of the sea, having been swept overboard from a coasting vessel.

“Rick and Ruddy,” the first volume of this series, pictures the growth of the love of the boy and his dog, and something of the happenings that fell to their lot. Sig Bailey, the coast guard, had been the first to glimpse Ruddy as the dog was washed ashore during an early fall storm. And, for a time, Rick was fearful lest Sig claim the puppy as his own—for Ruddy was only a puppy then.

But good-natured Sig said he had no use for a dog, whereas Rick had. So boy and dog became inseparable. Even the efforts of Matt Stanton, the old sea dog of a sailor, to get back Ruddy, who had once belonged to him, were not successful.

Sailor Stanton did succeed in luring Ruddy away, after the dog had crawled to Rick's home in the night. But by the help of his chums, Chot Benson and Thomas Edward Martin (called variously Tom and Ted) and aided by some Boy Scouts, our hero recovered Ruddy from the junkmen.

And after that exciting adventure, and some others more or less so, Ruddy had become a fixture in the Dalton home—as much a fixture as Haw Haw, the noisy black crow, who could whistle almost as well as any boy in Belemere.

The winter had come and gone, and now it was summer again; and as Rick strolled back to his home, followed by Ruddy, who ran here and there, covering about three times as much ground as was necessary, the boy wondered what further adventures, haps and mishaps lay before him in the long vacation now at hand.

“There’s one new boy on this street,” mused Rick, as he thought of Jack Slade. “But I don’t like him! I don’t want anything to do with him! I wonder why he hates dogs? And what makes his sister so she can’t see at one time, and can at another? It’s queer!”

Rick found his mother and Mazie on the side porch waiting for him rather anxiously.

“What happened?” asked Mazie. In one hand she held a sticky spoon, for she had started to make the candy, the sugar for which her brother had brought.

“You’ve been fighting!” exclaimed Mrs. Dalton, after the first look at her son.

“A little,” he admitted.

“Oh!” gasped Mazie. “With that—*girl?*”

“Her brother,” admitted Rick. “He kicked Ruddy!”

“Oh—Oh——!”

Mazie did not know what to say at this.

“Is she one of the new neighbors in the brick house?” asked Mrs. Dalton.

“Yes’m,” Rick answered. “She’s blind, part of the time.”

“Part of the time?” asked Mazie. “How can that be?”

“I don’t know,” Rick answered. “It is funny. But she was in our yard and couldn’t see to get out—guess she thought she was home. I led her out and then her brother—his name is Jack Slade and his hair’s partly red—he thought Ruddy was going to bite him and he kicked him, then I hit him and he knocked me down and he growled and his father came out——”

“Gracious!” exclaimed Mazie. “Nobody can tell what you’re talking about, Rick!”

“It *was* sort of mixed up,” admitted the boy with a smile. “But she’s a nice girl, and it’s too bad she gets blind every once in a while.”

“Is it blind staggers?” asked Mazie.

“Course not!” cried Rick, indignantly. “That’s what horses get! She’s a *girl!*”

“It *is* too bad,” said his mother. “I can’t understand it. I wonder if—your candy is burning, Mazie!” she suddenly cried, and Rick’s sister hastened into the house, with an exclamation of dismay.

“Was it needful to fight, Rick?” asked his mother in a low voice.

“Yes’m, it was!” he answered earnestly. “If you’d seen him kick Ruddy——”

“I’m glad I didn’t! Don’t forget to bring me up some coal.”

“No’m, I won’t.”

As he went about his usual household tasks—his “chores”—Rick could not help thinking of the strange girl, whose eyesight came and went in such an odd manner.

“I like her,” thought Rick, “but I don’t like that red-haired brother of hers,” and he little realized what an influence in the life of himself, and his dog, Ethel and Jack were to prove.

It was a day or two after this, during which time Rick had had no further sight of the new family in the brick house that, as he and Chot

Benson were coming home from a fishing trip, Ruddy suddenly darted away from the two boys, and ran into a dense thicket. A moment later Rick heard his pet barking loudly, and in a peculiar manner.

“He’s treed a rabbit!” cried Chot.

“Rabbits don’t climb trees!” laughed Rick. “But he’s scared up *something*, Ruddy has. Let’s go see what it is!”

“Sure!” agreed Chot.

A moment later the two lads came upon Ruddy standing in puzzled fashion over the prostrate form of a girl, lying prone on the tangled grass in the center of a clearing, girt about by thick bushes and stunted trees. Ruddy looked at the body, and then back to his master and Chot, who were outside the little clearing. Plainly the dog was asking the same questions that the boys wanted answered. And they were:

“Who is she? What has happened?”

CHAPTER III

RICK TO THE RESCUE

RICK and Chot, silently watching the movements of Ruddy, and glancing from the dog to the girl lying on the grass, suddenly knew that she was alive and was crying. She was sobbing so hard that her little body shook from head to foot, and the boys could hear her saying:

“Oh, will I ever get any better? Oh, why did it have to happen? I can’t stand it!”

In a flash Rick knew, now, who it was.

“Ethel Slade!” the owner of Ruddy whispered to Chot. “She’s blind—part of the time.”

“She is?” gasped Chot, and then, before either boy could speak again, Ruddy moved closer to the girl and began sniffing at her golden hair which was lying in a tangled mass on the ground.

The girl, without raising her head, stretched out her hand and, after groping a moment, found Ruddy's shaggy neck.

"Oh, Ruddy! Ruddy!" she sobbed. "Can you lead me home? Can you take me out of here? I shouldn't have come, when I knew it might get dark all of a sudden."

"Dark?" whispered Chot to his chum. "What's she mean?"

"Keep still!" cautioned Rick. "She means go blind, I guess. It happened before, in our yard. We got to lead her home. Here, you hold my fish and pole."

Rick gave his string of freshly caught chub and perch to his chum, and also handed over his pole and line. Thus free, Ruddy's master started through the bushes toward the girl, who was still lying outstretched on the grass, sobbing pitifully, now and then patting the dog's head with her upraised hand. And she murmured over and over again:

"Will the dark ever stop coming? Will I ever be like other girls?"

Ruddy looked up toward his friends, the boys. Clearly the dog understood them better than he did girls—especially crying girls. And as

Ruddy saw Rick coming toward him, the dog waved his tail and barked gently, to show how glad he was that some one was coming to take charge of matters.

“Who’s there?” asked the girl suddenly, sitting up, and putting her arm around Ruddy’s neck. “Is any one coming? I hear you. But I—I can’t see you!”

Her eyes, wet with tears, were turned full on Rick, and gave the boy a queer feeling when he realized that she could not see him.

“Please tell me who you are!” Ethel begged. “I’m all alone. I got lost, I guess, and—and I cried and this dog came—Ruddy—and he——”

“How did you know he was Ruddy?” asked Rick, as he walked toward her.

“Oh, you’re Rick!” she cried joyfully. “Now I’m all right! Please lead me home! I thought it might be—a tramp.”

“Not many tramps around here,” answered Rick. “Chot and I’ve been fishing. We’ll take you home. Good old dog, Ruddy!” he said to the setter, patting his head. “He found you,” Rick explained to Ethel. “We didn’t know you were here.”

“I shouldn’t have come,” she said. “But I

was all right when I started out. Then the—the darkness came—all of a sudden—and I stumbled on and seemed to get in a place where there was no way out. Oh, how frightened I was. Where am I, anyhow?"

"Not far from home," answered Rick, smiling at the girl, and then remembering that she could not see this friendly act on his part. "You're in a sort of clearing, with bushes and little trees all around. There's only one good path in."

"Then I must have stumbled on that to get in, and couldn't find it again," she said. "I'm so glad you found me—you, too, Ruddy," she went on, reaching out her hand to pat the dog. Ruddy had trailed off on some scent he suddenly picked up on the wind, but Rick brought him to heel with a whistle, and pulled him within reach of Ethel's outstretched hand.

"He likes to be petted," Rick said, as his animal chum wagged an appreciative tail.

"And I like to pet dogs," said the girl. "I wish——"

But she stopped suddenly, and did not finish what she was going to say.

"I ought to hurry home," she went on. "Daddy will be worried."

Rick wondered that she did not speak of her mother, though he learned why later.

“It isn’t far,” Rick told Ethel. “Just take hold of my hand. You carry the fish and poles, Chot.”

“Sure,” was the ready answer.

“Oh, is there fishing around here?” asked the girl, as Rick guided her steps out of the maze of small trees and bushes.

“Fine!” he answered. “Want to go some day?”

“Oh, I’d love to—but——”

She reached up her disengaged hand, the other being in the grasp of Rick, and touched her eyes. At the same time Chot gave his companion a strange look.

What was coming over Rick, Chot wondered, offering to take strange girls on a fishing trip? There was something very queer in this.

“I might fall in,” Ethel added, and she laughed a little, which seemed rather odd to the boys, for there were still traces of tears on her cheeks.

“Oh, we wouldn’t let you fall in, would we, Chot?” appealed Rick.

“Sure not!” said Chot, before he thought.

Then, to himself, he added: "Gol ding it! What'd I want to go and say that for? Let Rick look after his own girls! They're no good fishin' anyhow!"

But, afterward, Chot was glad he had not said this aloud.

Followed by Chot, and preceded by Ruddy, Rick led the blind girl out of the thicket, carefully holding back the swishing branches lest they whip her in the face.

And it was when they reached the boundary of the open lots, where the latter ended and the streets of Belemere began, that Ethel, removing her hand from the grasp of Rick, said:

"My eyes are getting all right again now. I can see my way home, thank you."

"Are you sure?" asked the boy.

"Sure! I shan't have to trouble you and Ruddy—and Chot—any further—at least not now. Besides I don't want daddy to worry, and he would if he saw me being led home. I can get along all right."

"'Tisn't any trouble!" half-grunted Chot, and he wondered to himself why he bothered to say this, for, as a rule, Chot didn't care much for girls.

“No trouble at all,” added Rick. “We’d just as soon go all the way home with you.”

“Thank you, but you don’t need to,” Ethel said. “It will be better if I walk up by myself. And my eyes won’t go dark again very soon.”

She nodded and smiled at them, and turned down the street that led to her house—the only brick residence in that part of Belemere. Rick took back his fish and pole from his chum, and together the two boys watched the girl’s progress. She walked straight along, with never a stop or falter, until she turned in her own gate.

“She’s all right now,” said Rick.

“I guess so,” agreed Chot. “You know her? What makes her get that way?”

“I know her—a little,” admitted Rick. “They just moved in our street. She gets blind every once in a while.”

“I never heard anything like that,” declared Chot. “You s’pose she really does?”

“Does what?”

“Get so she can’t see.”

“Sure she does! Think she’d fool us?”

“Some girls would,” said Chot.

“She wouldn’t. Besides mocking is catching, and she might go blind in earnest.”

“That’s so,” admitted Chot. “Well, anyhow, it’s a good thing we found her.”

“You mean Ruddy did.”

“Sure! Your dog is a good one! Well, I got to hurry or I’ll be late for supper. I’m glad I got some fish, for ma doesn’t mind if I’m late if I bring fish.”

“Mine either. S’long!”

“S’long. See you t’morrow.”

They separated, Ruddy waving his tail in farewell to Chot as the setter and his master made their way home.

“What do you reckon *does* ail her, Momsie?” asked Rick that evening, when he was telling the day’s adventure.

“It must be some disease of the eyes,” Mrs. Dalton said. “Poor girl! I must call and see her folks.”

“She’s nice,” declared Rick. “But that brother of hers—say, I don’t want to see *him* any more!”

“Did he kick Ruddy again?” asked Mazie.

“No, and he won’t get the chance. But any-

body that kicks my dog once—that's enough!"

It was a few days after this that Rick, coming home from the store with a jug of molasses his mother had sent him after, found no one at the house on his arrival. His mother had said she might go out—perhaps to call on the Slade family—so Rick set the molasses jug on the porch and went off to find Chot, or one of his other boy chums.

"Come on, Ruddy!" called Rick, as he started out of the yard. But the setter evidently had other plans, for, with a bark, as if asking permission, he disappeared through the bushes in the direction of Silver Lake, where once he had had the battle with the swans.

"All right! Go swimming if you want to," said Rick, for his dog frequently did that. "You'll find me over in the lots, playing ball."

Rick often talked to his dog in this fashion, just as if Ruddy could understand. And I think perhaps the setter did know a great deal that was said to him. Though of course it was the tone of voice, or the manner, rather than the words themselves, that made him understand.

So Rick ran on, and soon he and Chot, with Tom-Ted Martin, were wildly playing a game

of ball. For the time being Ruddy was forgotten.

The red setter had gone for a dip in Silver Lake, as Rick had guessed he might. But Ruddy went nowhere near the big white swans. One battle with them, in which his tail was severely pinched in the bird's powerful beak, was enough for Ruddy. He gave the swans a wide berth.

Coming back, fresh and clean from a dip in the lake, Ruddy saw, on the side steps of his house and he always thought of the Dalton home as *his* house—a strange cat.

Now Ruddy was not overly fond of cats, but yet he was not as cruel to them as are some dogs. In fact with Sallie, who lived at the home of Mrs. Watson, next door, Ruddy was very friendly. But whenever he saw a strange cat Ruddy always chased her—just to see what she would do. They generally, one and all, did the same thing—arched up their back, made their tail big and hissed like a snake.

“I wonder if this cat will do that—or something new?” perhaps Ruddy may have thought.

At any rate he made a dive for this cat, running half way up the steps of the porch on

which Rick had set down the molasses jug. Instantly the cat darted behind the jug, out of sight and out of reach of Ruddy.

“Oh, ho! That isn’t fair!” the dog probably thought to himself. “I can’t see what you’re doing there. I’ll get you out!”

Now Ruddy was a wise dog. More than once, before he and Sallie became friends, he had suffered from a sore and scratched nose on account of cats. Ruddy wanted no more of that. So instead of making a dash behind the molasses jug, Ruddy put his paw to the rear of the container of sweet, sticky stuff, and tried to reach the cat that way.

But a dog’s nose or a dog’s paw were alike to this strange cat. She was afraid of them. So she instantly began to hiss and “spit” as loudly as she could, at the same time arching up her back and fluffing out her tail.

But she did more than this. She made a dart to get to a safer place than the haven behind the jug, and as she darted out to one side, Ruddy made a dive after her.

Then several things happened. Either the cat or the dog—perhaps both—overturned the

jug. It was round, the porch floor was slanting, and the jug rolled toward the outer edge.

Ruddy turned quickly, to take after the running cat, but his pawns slipped on the smooth floor of the porch and he fell, slipping up against the side of the house and then sliding along the porch and toward the edge, which had no railing.

First the molasses jug fell off and, striking the stone walk, broke. Out oozed the sweet, sticky molasses. It spread into a pool, and, an instant later Ruddy rolled off the porch into that same, thick pool. And before he could regain his feet the setter had rolled completely over in the molasses, covering himself with the sticky stuff.

Poor Ruddy set up a mournful howl as he realized the plight into which he had fallen. He slipped and slid about in the molasses as he managed to struggle to his feet, and then, as he saw the cat racing away across the yard, what must have been a spirit of revenge took possession of Ruddy.

“It’s all her fault for making this happen to me!” he must have thought. “I’ll chase her and scare her good!”

And then, dripping molasses as he was, Ruddy set off with a series of loud barks, chasing the unfortunate, strange cat.

But the worst was yet to come.

CHAPTER IV

TIN CAN SPORT

MRS. MUNROE, who lived a few doors from Rick, happened to be changing some of her feather pillows that day. She was putting new "ticking" covers on them, because the old had become worn and soiled, and she was doing the work of shifting the feathers from one case to another in the woodshed back of her home.

"For I don't want the feathers flying all over the house," she had said to her daughter before taking the pillows to the shed. "And it can't be done out of doors, for the least breeze would blow everything everywhere."

And just about the time that Mrs. Munroe was shaking the first case full of pillows into a fresh bag of ticking, along came Ruddy, dripping molasses and chasing the cat.

The red setter dog had gotten over the first

shock of finding himself all sweet and sticky. He had paused for a moment, after he slipped and rolled into the molasses that oozed from the broken jug, to lick off a little of it. Then he had raced on after the strange cat. Perhaps Ruddy thought, if dogs do think and this I believe, perhaps he thought there would be time enough, after he had worried and chased the cat, to take another bath in Silver Lake.

However that may be, Ruddy rushed on with joyful barks, out of his yard and into the yard of Mrs. Munroe, the strange cat a few lengths in advance. The cat, seeing the open woodshed door, but not knowing Mrs. Munroe was in there changing her pillows, made a dash for this haven of refuge.

Ruddy gave a louder and more joyful bark. He knew that woodshed. He had been in it many times and he knew there was only a small window opening out of it, being closed by a screen in summer.

“Now I’ve got you!” the dog must have thought as he dashed on into the shed after the cat.

Mrs. Munroe was in the act of shaking the last half of the feathers from the old ticking to

the new, when the cat, with a flying leap, sailed over her head and landed on a shelf on the woodshed wall.

“Mercy me!” gasped Mrs. Munroe.
“What’s this?”

Then she saw the cat.

“Scat! Get out of here—please do!” begged Mrs. Munroe. The first command she uttered in a loud voice, adding the “please,” because she really loved animals. “What’s the matter? You act as if something had been chasing you!” she said.

And a moment later she found out what had disturbed the cat.

For Ruddy, molasses dripping from almost every hair, covered with a few dried leaves and sticks where he had rolled on the ground, burst into the woodshed. Ruddy paid no attention to Mrs. Munroe, though he knew she was a friend of his, for she had often saved him choice bones. Ruddy’s whole attention was centered on the cat, which was up on the shelf.

With a loud bark Ruddy took the most direct route for reaching pussy, and Mrs. Munroe happened to be in his way, holding the half-emptied feather pillow. It was not her fault, nor

Ruddy's, I suppose. Things just were that way.

In another instant the dog made a leap for the cat, brushed Mrs. Munroe to one side, thereby making her drop the pillows and the loose feathers, and brought up with a thud against the side of the woodshed. Ruddy was going so fast he couldn't stop. But when he hit the shed, giving a yelp of pain as he did so, he bounded back and fell in a heap in the midst of the loose feathers.

You do not need to be told what happened. Covered as he was with the molasses, everywhere a feather touched the dog it stuck. In a moment or two, as he wriggled about in getting to his feet, poor Ruddy was covered with feathers and looked like some animal from a nightmare dream.

“Well, of all things!” cried Mrs. Munroe. “I never saw the beat of this in my life! Oh! Oh!”

Ruddy, indeed, was both a funny-looking and a scary sight. Feathers stuck out all over him, on his legs, his back, his sides, his tail and even on his head. Some were molassesed

fast over his eyes, making him look like an old man whose eyebrows were like miniature shoe brushes.

And Ruddy must suddenly have realized how he looked—what a ridiculous figure he presented. For, all at once, he lost interest in the cat, and slunk out of the shed, his feathered tail drooping between his legs.

Mrs. Munroe gave one look at the dog, and then burst out laughing. She really couldn't help it. Ruddy did look so odd!

The dog heard her laughter, and in that strange way animals have of sensing your feelings, he knew he was being laughed at. And animals do not like fun poked at them. Dogs will play together, falling all over and turning the most ridiculous somersaults. But they do that in sport, as men and boys play at games, doing things they would not otherwise do. And a dog no more likes to be laughed at when he has made himself foolish than do boys and men. This applies to many other animals.

So when Mrs. Munroe laughed at Ruddy the dog gave her a sad and reproachful look, and slunk away. The cat, seeing there was no

further danger, let down the arch in her back, allowed her tail to assume its natural size and leaped down off the shelf.

“Don’t *you* go rolling in feathers now!” cautioned Mrs. Munroe, “though I don’t s’pose they’d cling to you the way they did to Ruddy. He was all sticky. I wonder what from? Gracious! I’m glad I wasn’t emptying a feather *bed*! I’d ’a’ been *smothered* when Ruddy knocked me down! As it is I’ll sneeze feathers for a week!”

She began to pick up what she could of the fluffy material, giving no further heed to the dog or cat. As for Ruddy he had but one idea—to get a bath as soon as possible. He loved to be clean, and he knew he needed a dip in Weed River or Silver Lake. And he was going by the least public way to get there, sneaking through back lots and alley ways so no one would see him.

But, as it happened, about this same time Rick and Chot were coming back from the ball game. They, too, took a short cut, for, at the last moment, Chot remembered his mother had told him to bring something from the store for supper, and Rick offered to go with him.



The dog gave her a sad and reproachful look and slunk away

So, as it chanced, the two boys, and some of their chums, met poor Ruddy as the dog was slinking along to get a bath.

“Oh, look!” cried Chot, pointing. “What a funny dog!”

“It’s a bird dog!” exclaimed Tom Martin. “Anyway he’s got *feathers!*”

“Zowie! What a critter!” laughed Harry West.

But it needed more than a coat of molasses and feathers to disguise Ruddy from Rick. The boy knew his dog almost at once.

“It’s Ruddy!” he cried, hurrying forward while the dog, cringing as though he were at fault, crawled to meet his master. “Poor, poor Ruddy!” exclaimed Rick. “Who did this to you?”

He could not imagine it having happened by accident.

“What is it, anyhow?” asked Chot.

“He’s been in some sticky stuff—or somebody poured it on him, and then rolled him in feathers,” said Rick.

“Who you s’pose’d do a thing like that?” asked Tom.

“It’s molasses!” exclaimed Chot, looking at

a little puddle which dripped from the underside of the dog and collected on a flat stone.

“Molasses and feathers!” cried Harry. “Who did it, Rick?”

“It must ‘a’ been that mean skunk Jack Slade!” declared Rick. “He hates Ruddy! He kicked him the other day! Wait till I get hold of him!”

“That’s a mean shame!” cried the other boys.

“Take him down to the lake and wash him off,” suggested Chot. “It’s a good thing ‘t isn’t tar!”

“I should say so!” agreed Rick. “Come on, Ruddy, old fellow! I’ll clean you off!”

The dog glanced up with a grateful look in his brown eyes. Rick grasped him by the collar, to lead him along, and, at that moment a voice on the other side of a screen of bushes said:

“Here’s a dog now, fellows! Where’s that tin can? We’ll tie it to his tail and watch him run!”

“That’s right!” chimed in another lad. “Great sport!”

Rick and his chums stood, waiting.

A moment later there burst through the

underbrush Jack Slade and two or three other boys of the rougher element in Belemere.

“Oh, so you fellows are going to tie one on too, are you?” asked Sam Small.

“What?” asked Rick. “Tie what?”

“A tin can on that dog’s tail! Where’d you catch him?”

“I didn’t catch him,” Rick answered. “This is *Ruddy!*”

“Ruddy!” cried Sam and his particular chum, Sid Osborne, echoed: “What a looking dog!”

“Yes, and I know who made him look this way!” exclaimed Rick with flashing eyes. “You did this!” he accused Jack Slade. “I’m going to punch your face!”

CHAPTER V

A HAPPY PROSPECT

JACK SLADE dropped the tin can and string he had been carrying and doubled his fists.

“I’m all ready for you if you want to fight!” he said. “I knocked you down once, and I can do it again! Don’t let him sic the dog on me, Sam!” he called to his chum.

“I don’t sic Ruddy on anybody!” cried Rick. “Here, Chot. You hold him for me,” he added to his friend, leading the setter to one side.

“He wouldn’t bite you anyhow, Jack Slade! You’re too mean! I’d be afraid my dog would be poisoned if he bit *you!*”

“Oh, is that so?” sneered Jack. “Well, come on if you’re going to fight!”

“I’ll fight anybody, I don’t care if they are bigger than I am, when they pour molasses and scatter feathers on my dog!” cried Rick.

“Who put molasses on your dog?” challenged Jack, beginning to circle around Rick, looking for a chance to hit him.

“I say you did it!” declared the master of Ruddy. “And now you want to tie a tin can to his tail!”

“I didn’t do it!” asserted Jack. “I never saw your dog before to-day, and I didn’t put any molasses on him. Where’d I get molasses, anyhow?”

“Didn’t you do it?” asked Rick, beginning to think, for the first time, that perhaps he might be mistaken.

“No, I didn’t do it! Did I, fellows?” appealed Jack to his chums.

“Naw! Course not!” chorused Sam and Sid. They did not deny, however, nor did Jack, that they had intended to tie a tin can to Ruddy’s tail, or to the tail of some unfortunate dog, if they had a chance.

“Well, if you didn’t do it, who did?” Rick wanted to know.

“How can I tell?” sneered Jack. “Ask me somethin’ easier! But I’m ready if you want to fight! I can knock you down again and——”

“I don’t want to fight if you didn’t do any-

thing to Ruddy," spoke Rick, unclenching his fists. "But somebody gummed him all up with molasses and then sprinkled feathers over him."

"He sure is a sick looking dog!" chuckled Sam.

"I wouldn't have him for a gift, not if you chucked in two cats!" sneered Sid. "Come on, fellows," he said to Sam and Jack. "We'll go find another dog to tin-can!"

That seemed to be a favorite sport with him and his cronies.

"All right," growled Jack. "But if anybody wants to fight I'm ready!" and the red-haired brother of gentle Ethel Slade looked angrily at Chot and Tom.

"No use fightin' for nothin'," said Chot, cheerfully. "Come on, Rick. We'll go wash Ruddy."

"Better scrub him with sand-soap!" jeered Sid as he and the other two boys walked away with their tin can and string.

"We'll scrub *your* face with it!" retorted Chot.

Rick was thinking too much about poor Ruddy to send back any sharp answers. He led his

canine companion along toward Silver Lake. For the time being the fight had been passed over. But, somehow, Rick felt he and Jack would some day need to "have it out," in a good battle of fists.

"He's just as mean as they make 'em!" declared Tom, as he and Chot trudged along beside Rick.

"All of 'em are," declared Chot. "The whole three."

"After we get Ruddy cleaned, we'll sort of follow 'em," suggested Rick. "And if we find 'em tying cans to dogs' tails we'll make 'em stop!"

"Sure!" agreed his chums. They, as well as Rick, belonged to the Boy Scouts, and of course were kind to animals.

Poor Ruddy certainly was glad to get that bath. The molasses and feathers came off more easily than Rick and his friends had dared to hope, and in a little while Ruddy was no worse off than he had been many a time after leaping into Silver Lake to bring back the sticks Rick tossed in.

"What's the matter with your dog?" asked Ethel of Rick, as he passed her house, where

she was sitting on the stoop. Ruddy was dripping water, but he was clean and—happy.

“Oh, somebody poured molasses on him,” Rick answered.

“What a shame! Poor doggie!” she said pityingly, as she came down to the gate, and patted Ruddy’s wet head.

“Oh, I got it all off,” said Rick. “But I’d like to find out who did it.”

As Ethel was making herself firmer friends than ever with the setter, by gently pulling his damp ears, her brother came along.

“Don’t you let that dog in our yard!” he cried to Rick. “If you do I’ll kick him out!”

“Jack!” exclaimed Ethel, and Rick noticed that her eyes seemed all right now, and she showed no trace of blindness.

“I don’t care!” stormed Jack. “I won’t have that ugly mutt in here. I hate dogs!”

“Except to tie tin cans to their tails!” spoke Rick, quietly.

“Go on away from here if you don’t want to fight!” warned Jack. “This is our yard and we don’t have to let dogs in if we don’t want to.”

“No danger of me letting Ruddy in,” answered Rick.

“He isn’t a mutt at all, Jack! He’s a fine setter!” said Ethel.

“Um!” was all her brother answered, as he hurried in, slamming the gate shut after him.

“Don’t forget you promised to take me fishing some day,” whispered Ethel to Rick, as he and Ruddy passed on down the street.

“I won’t forget,” he replied with a smile. “We’ll take Ruddy along!”

“That’ll be fine!” she declared, her eyes sparkling as though nothing had ever happened to them.

“Rick, who broke the molasses jug?” his mother asked as boy and dog came racing and bounding into the yard a little later.

“Molasses jug?” repeated Rick, and then his mind became a jumble of queer thoughts.

“Yes, our molasses jug. I sent you to the store to have it filled, and when I came back it was broken on the ground at the side of the porch.”

“Molasses jug? Broken!” exclaimed Rick. “Why, I set it on the porch, and then Chot and I went to play ball. Ruddy, he went down toward the lake and—that’s how it happened!” he suddenly cried.

“How what happened?” his mother asked.

“How the molasses jug got broken! Ruddy must have bumped against it, and then rolled over in the stuff. But where did he get the feathers?”

“Feathers?” repeated Mrs. Dalton wonderingly. “Is this a riddle, Rick?”

“You’d ’a’ thought so if you’d seen Ruddy, all covered with feathers,” the boy went on. “He sure was a sight. But where did they come from? Ruddy must ’a’ jumped against the jug and broke it. I guess Jack Slade didn’t do it after all,” and Rick explained how he had met the other boys.

It was not until Mrs. Munroe came over a little later, to find out how Ruddy fared, that the story of her feather pillows, the chase after the cat and the resulting covering of the dog with the chicken foliage was learned.

“So that’s how it happened!” exclaimed Rick, when the story had been pieced together.

“Oh, I wish I could have seen Ruddy when he looked like a big rooster!” exclaimed Mazie.

“You’d ’a’ felt sorry for him,” declared her brother. “But he’s all right now. I’m going

to take Ethel Slade fishing some day," he went on.

"Oh, may I come?" begged Mazie.

"Sure," answered Rick, for he and his sister were great chums, and Mazie could put a worm on the hook almost as good as a boy.

"Well, you'd better go get me some more molasses," suggested Mrs. Dalton. "Mazie wants to make some candy, and——"

"Oh, I'll go!" cried Rick. "And I'm sorry Ruddy spilled the other. I wonder whose cat he chased. I hope it wasn't Ethel's."

"My, he's getting awful fond of her all of a sudden!" laughed Mazie to her mother.

"I am not! Anyhow, she likes Ruddy, if her mean red-haired brother doesn't, and I wouldn't want my dog to chase her cat!" declared Rick.

He was half way down the walk, on his way to the store, with Ruddy following, when Harry Taylor, Scout Master of Troop 1, Black Eagle Patrol, came along the street.

"Oh, Rick! Just the one I'm looking for," said Harry. "Don't you want to come camping with us next week?"

"Camping?" cried Rick, his eyes sparkling at the happy prospect. "Who's going?"

“Oh, a lot of your Boy Scout chums. I haven’t asked Chot and Tom, yet, but I’m going to. We’re going to camp for a month or more at Lake Evergreen. Do you think you can be with us?”

“Oh, it would be great!” cried Rick. “Can I go, mother?” he called out, hastening back toward the house.

“Where?”

“Camping with the Boy Scouts. Here’s Harry Taylor. He wants me to go, and Tom and Chot are going!”

“I’m not so sure of that,” said the Scout Master with a laugh at Rick’s eagerness. “They may not be allowed, though I hope they will. Could you let Rick come, Mrs Dalton?”

“Why, yes, I guess so, if his father says it’s all right,” was the answer, for Mrs. Dalton had not forgotten how Harry and some Boy Scouts had helped Rick get back Ruddy when the old sailor took him to the shack of the junk man the year before.

“Oh, Zowie!” cried Rick, and he tossed up into the air the tin can his mother had given him in which to get more molasses. “Oh, boy! Camp! This is great!”

CHAPTER VI

OFF TO CAMP

RICK DALTON was so excited, at the prospect of camping with the Boy Scouts, that he hardly wanted to go to the store after the molasses.

“Let’s hike right down to my father’s place and ask him if I can’t go,” said Rick to Harry, the Scout Master. “He’ll say I can, as long as my mother says so.”

“But I need the molasses, son,” called Mrs. Dalton with a smile.

“And I have to go see if Tom and Chot can go,” remarked Harry. “Why not come along with me, Rick, and go to the store too? You can stop and see your chums, and tell them there is a chance that you may go camping. I’ll tell their mothers you are willing that Rick should go to the lake with us,” he said to Mrs. Dalton.

“Yes, I know Rick would be all right with

the Boy Scouts," his mother said. "But of course he'll have to ask his father."

"Oh, sure! But I know he'll say yes!" declared Rick.

"I wish I could go camping," spoke Mazie wistfully as her brother and the Scout Master, with Ruddy frisking around them, went down the street.

"Well, it would be nice," her mother said. "But if Rick goes away you and I, and perhaps daddy, will go to Grandma's."

"Oh, that will be as much fun as camping," Mazie cried in delight.

"Will we live in a tent, and have everything like a real camp?" asked Rick of the Scout Master, as the two trudged along the Belemere street.

"Oh, yes, it will be a regular camp," answered Harry Taylor. "I do hope you can go."

"You don't hope it any more than I do," declared Rick. "There's Chot now! Hi, Chot!" he shouted. "We're going camping! Oh, Zowie!"

"Don't be too sure," cautioned the Scout Master, but he could not blame Rick for being so excited. It was now summer, the feeling

was in the blood of every regular boy that he wanted to live in the open, near some water and wear his old clothes, doing as much as possible as he pleased—and camp was the only place where this could be done.

“Camp! Oh, lollypops!” cried Chot, when told of the plan. “Wait until I ask my mother.”

Mrs. Benson, after a brief consideration of the matter, said, as had Mrs. Dalton, that her husband must decide whether or not Chot could go. And Tom Martin’s mother answered likewise. But Rick, Chot and Tom felt sure their fathers would agree.

“Let me know to-night, or to-morrow morning, whether you can go,” requested the Scout Master as he hurried along to tell some of the other prospective campers of the plans. He left Rick, Chot and Tom talking delightedly and excitedly together, and called a word of caution to the master of Ruddy.

“Don’t forget your mother’s molasses, Rick. Remember, you’re a Boy Scout, and we want to take to camp only those with perfect records.”

“I’ll get the molasses!” promised Rick. “Come on, fellows!” he called to his two most

particular chums. "We can talk about camp on the way."

And they did—to their hearts' content. They were so much in earnest about it—telling each other how they would fish and swim, to say nothing of going on hikes—that Rick barely reached the store to get the molasses before it was about to close. But by racing at the last minute he managed to be the last customer to squeeze in.

"What's the hurry?" asked Mr. Brown, the storekeeper. "Got company at your house?"

"No, but I'm going camping."

"With molasses?" and Mr. Brown looked over the tops of his glasses as he bent down to open the faucet of the molasses barrel.

"Oh, no," laughed Rick. "That's for Mazie's candy. Ruddy spilled the jug full I got here a while ago."

"Good land!" exclaimed Mr. Brown, as the thick, sweet stuff began to fill the can. "I was wonderin' why you come back so soon ag'in. So the dog spilled it?"

"Yep! Chasing after a cat."

"Wa'al, I want t' know! Kinder expensive dog t' have around, ain't he, Rick?"

“Oh, well, he doesn’t break a molasses jug every day,” and Rick took the can and hurried back home, his thoughts filled with the joys of camp life.

Mr. and Mrs. Dalton talked the matter over that evening, after Rick and Mazie had gone to bed, and they decided that Rick might go camping to Lake Evergreen with the Boy Scouts.

“It’s a fine organization, and a boy can’t have too much of camp life, if it’s the right kind,” said Mr. Dalton.

His wife agreed with him, and the next morning Rick learned, to his great joy, that he was to spend most of the summer in a tent, with other boys. Hardly had he ceased wildly jumping around with Ruddy to celebrate the good news than Chot and Tom came racing over.

“I can go!” cried Tom.

“So can I!” added Chot.

“We’re all three going!” yelled Rick, to show that he, too, was included in the joyous trio.

And then they began feverishly to talk about it, ending up with the three of them going off together (with Ruddy of course) to tell the Scout Master.

“And could I bring Ruddy to camp with me?” asked Rick, rather fearful of what the answer would be.

“Bring Ruddy? Of course!” answered Henry Taylor. “A camp doesn’t amount to a hill of beans unless you have a dog, as well as boys. Bring Ruddy along!”

And Ruddy must have known good times were in store for him when Rick threw his arms about his pet’s neck and hugged him.

“Oh, Ruddy, we’re going to camp! We’re going to camp! Oh, Zowie!” murmured Rick over and over again in the dog’s ear. And from the manner in which he wagged his tail I believe Ruddy must have known what Rick said.

Once it was settled that Rick, Ruddy and the boy chums were to go to camp, active preparations were started. It was necessary for each camper to take along a certain outfit, and the Scout Master gave the boys a list of what they would need.

Chot, Tom and Rick were in the latter’s yard one day, going over their outfits to make sure nothing was missing, when Mrs. Munroe, in whose pillow feathers Ruddy had floundered

when covered with molasses, came over to call on Mrs. Dalton. As it was a hot day, the two ladies sat on the porch, and, when there came a lull in the camp preparations Rick and his chums could hear the talk of Mrs. Dalton and Mrs. Munroe.

“Did you hear about Mr. Slade?” asked Mrs. Munroe.

“Nothing special,” answered Rick’s mother, and the boys, who could not help hearing what was said, listened more closely.

“Well, there’s something queer about him,” went on the caller. “A friend of mine, who lives in North Chester, where the Slades moved from to come here, says he’s been very queer since his wife died.”

“Oh, is his wife dead? I didn’t know that,” said Mrs. Dalton. “I meant to call, but haven’t had a chance.”

“Yes, she’s been dead three or four years. Mr. Slade’s sister—her first name’s Irma and she’s an old maid—she keeps house for him. I guess she doesn’t have it easy, either. For Ethel, that’s the girl, has something the matter with her, and that Jack is a terror, if ever there was one!”

Rick agreed with this last statement at any rate.

“I’m sorry about that poor girl,” said Mrs. Dalton. “She has spells of blindness. Once she wandered into our yard and Rick led her out. Another time she was in the woods and Ruddy found her.”

“It is too bad,” said Mrs. Munroe. “I hear she’s doctoring for her eyes, and maybe she’ll get better. But it’s the strangest thing that I heard about Mr. Slade. Did you know he was hunting for gold?”

“Hunting for gold?” repeated Mrs. Dalton, as her visitor leaned back in her chair, after making this strange statement. “Gold here in Belemere? There never has been any here. You don’t mean that foolish story about Captain Kidd, or some pirate, having buried a chest of gold somewhere near the beach; do you?”

“Oh, no,” answered Mrs. Munroe. “This is different. But friends of mine have seen him wandering in the hills back of Belemere, picking up stones, tapping them with a hammer, looking at them with one of those funny things a jeweler screws on his eye when he fixes your watch, and everything like that!”

“Did you hear that?” whispered Rick to his chums.

“I don’t believe he’d be looking for gold,” declared Chot.

“Me, either,” added Tom.

“Listen,” advised Rick, not thinking he and his friends were doing wrong in overhearing talk that did not seem to be secret. Mrs. Munroe was speaking again.

“Mr. Slade surely is queer,” she said. “If it isn’t gold he’s looking for it’s something valuable. And they say he’s bought a piece of land near Evergreen Lake and he’s going to start a gold mine there.”

“Is that so? I hadn’t heard,” remarked Mrs. Dalton. “But I guess you can’t call it a gold mine until you get gold out of it.”

“Well, anyhow, he’s going to start mining near Evergreen Lake,” said the visitor, and at this news the boys looked at one another.

“That’s where we’re going camping,” whispered Chot.

“Yes,” remarked Rick. “I wonder if we’ll see Mr. Slade there?”

“Maybe we’ll find gold ourselves!” suggested Tom.

They would have listened further, but just then the Scout Master came along to advise with them about the coming camping trip, and there were so many things to talk about that Rick and his chums soon forgot the queer story Mrs. Munroe had told concerning Mr. Slade.

Rick, and perhaps Ruddy also, thought the time would never come when they were to start for camp. But at last the day arrived, and you may easily imagine that Rick did not have to be called more than once that morning.

Kits and valises of clothes were packed and in readiness, and Chot and Tom assembled at Rick's house as a meeting place. Harry Taylor was to call for them in an auto truck in which all the Boy Scouts were to be taken to camp with their baggage.

As Rick and his friends, not forgetting Ruddy, were waiting with what patience they could for the arrival of the Scout Master and the truck, Ethel Slade passed. She looked up and nodded at Rick and the other boys, no trace of her former plight appearing.

“Hello!” she called, cheerfully.

“Hello!” answered the trio.

“You’re going camping, aren’t you?” she stated, rather than asked. “Up to Evergreen Lake. My brother and I are going, too!”

“You—you are?” gasped Rick, and there was a sinking feeling in his heart as he thought of the possibility of mean, red-haired Jack Slade being camped near where Ruddy would be all summer.

“Yes, my father has bought some land at the lake, and we’re going to camp there. I’ll see you at camp!” she called back over her shoulder, as she walked down street. “You can take me fishing there, Rick!”

“Um!” he murmured, which might mean one thing or another.

“What part of the lake you going to camp on?” asked Chot.

“Down toward the lower end, wherever that is,” the girl answered. “I don’t know anything about it. I’ve never been there. But my father says he can find what he wants there. Good-bye, Rick and Ruddy!” and she waved her hand to the dog, who wagged his tail in answer. “See you at camp!”

“Did you hear that?” whispered Tom to the

others. "Her father is going to dig for gold there! Maybe we can start a gold mine of our own!"

But before Rick or Chot could answer the auto truck lumbered along, containing the Scout Master and several boys who had been picked up on the way.

"All aboard!" cried Harry Taylor.

"Good-by, Mother! Good-by, Mazie!" cried Rick, as he climbed up. "We're off to camp!"

And many strange happenings were to occur before he saw home again.

CHAPTER VII

A NIGHT ALARM

TALKING and singing, calling greetings to friends they passed in the street, telling each other about the glorious times before them, the auto truck load of Boy Scouts, including Rick and Ruddy, was driven through Belemere, and out to the open country leading to Evergreen Lake.

“I’m going to fish every day!” cried Charlie Rubin, as he waved his hand to a boy chum; who was not lucky enough to be going to camp.

“And I’m going to learn how to swim that new crawl stroke,” added Hen Marsh. All the boys could swim, some better than others, for no one was taken by the Scout Master who could not look after himself should he chance to fall into the water.

“I want to take some long hikes and stop on the road and cook meals,” was Rick’s ambition.

“I wish we could find something new,” said Chot. “I mean something wonderful, say a river no one ever saw before, like Colonel Roosevelt did.”

“Huh!” exclaimed Charlie. “I guess all the rivers in this part of the country were discovered years ago! Weren’t they, Mr. Taylor?” he asked, for the boys had been taught to call the Scout Master by this courteous title, as befitted the discipline of camp.

“Yes; I’m afraid there aren’t any rivers left to discover—at least not big ones,” said Harry, as he was called by his older friends. “But you boys will find plenty else to discover, I fancy. You may find some new birds—at least new to you, or new minerals, or something like that. Keep your eyes open—that’s one of the reasons why you are going to camp, to learn to observe and do things for yourself. Nearly all great discoveries were made because some one used his or her eyes to better advantage than some one else. Learn to observe!”

“’Member the time we found the skeleton of the dead horse?” asked Tom Martin, as he moved to one side to let Ruddy edge in between him and Rick.

“Gosh, yes!” exclaimed Chot. “First we thought it was a giant’s skeleton.”

“And we ran away,” added Rick, laughing at the recollection.

“Then we went back and gathered up the bones and sold ’em,” remarked Tom. For the boys had done just that. There was a market for old bones, at the fertilizer factory not far from Belemere, and the lads made pocket money by gathering and selling the refuse, as they did old iron.

Gradually the noisy, happy crowd of Boy Scouts in the auto truck became more quiet, until, as the vehicle swung out on the long road that led to Evergreen Lake the lads were talking more quietly in little groups, while the Scout Master sat with the driver and discussed the state of the road, and about how long it would take to reach the camping place.

“I wonder if that Slade bunch is really coming to camp where we are?” said Tom Martin, as he, Chot and Rick sat together in the rear of the truck, with Ruddy at their feet.

“Ethel said so, and she ought to know,” commented Rick.

“Maybe her father is going to take her away

so her eyes will get better," suggested Chot. "I wonder what makes her go blind that way, anyhow?"

"It is queer," admitted Rick. "But did you hear what she said about her father going to look for what he wants at the lake?"

"Sure!" assented his chums. "I'll bet it's gold!" added Chot. "And if there's gold in one place there'll be some in another. We can discover some, too!"

"And we won't tell the others until we've found it," said Tom, "else they might laugh at us. But of course we'll whack up with 'em!"

"Sure!" agreed Rick, in a low voice. That was part of the unwritten Boy Scout law.

"If only that dinky Jack Slade wasn't coming to camp near us it would be all right," said Tom.

"He is a sort of skunk," admitted Rick. "But Ruddy and I'll steer clear of him; won't we, old fellow?" and he leaned down to pat his dog's head, while Ruddy thumped his tail on the floor of the car in answer.

Thus talking, and speculating on what might happen when they reached camp, and hoping

they would come upon some strange mystery, the boys found the time passing quickly. It was noon almost before they realized it, and when the auto stopped near a roadside spring, and the Scout Master made an announcement, you should have heard the shouts of delight that followed.

“We’ll cook grub here!” said Harry Taylor.

“Oh, boy!” shouted Rick, and the others chimed in with yells of “Zowie! Let’s eat! Get busy! Happy day!” and so on.

They had brought with them sufficient food for two meals, lunch on the way, and supper in camp that night. After that they would live on the regular camp fare, a considerable quantity of victuals having been sent on in advance.

But for the meals on the trip each boy was allowed to bring what he pleased, it having been suggested that they pack in their kits a piece of steak, or some frankfurters which could be cooked over an open fire. Bread and butter, cheese, crackers and cookies or cakes formed the other part of the meal, and there was clear, cold water from the spring.

“Start your fires, boys,” called the Scout

Master, when the truck had pulled up to one side of the road, and the crowd of Scouts had descended. "We'll be here for an hour or more, so you don't have to hurry."

He gave general supervision to the lads, but each one was allowed to do more or less as he pleased, for it is the aim of Boy Scout activities to make its members self-reliant. The lads formed into little groups, several cooking at one fire.

They did not produce a blaze by the ancient method of twirling a pointed stick, by means of a bow string, in a little wooden pit, the friction setting some "punk" aglow. Each boy was capable of doing that, however, but this time the more efficient and speedier match was used.

Soon appetizing odors filled the air, and a little later the lads were sitting on the grassy bank, beneath the trees, eating what they had cooked. What if some steaks were a bit burned, and others had fallen into the ashes, many bits of ember clinging to the meat?

"It only makes it taste all the better," said Rick, as he picked a piece of charcoal off the chop he was eating. He tossed Ruddy the remaining bone, and the dog began to eat it right

from the ground, getting a considerable amount of grit in with his food, it seemed.

But dogs must take their food that way. Did you ever give a dog a bone on a plate and notice how quickly he dragged the dainty off the china to the dirty ground to gnaw it?

There are two reasons for this. One is that the ground, being more rough, gives the dog a better chance to get a hold on the bone. The other is that a certain amount of earth and grit is as good for a dog as it is for a chicken, which has no teeth. A dog's stomach is not like a boy's, for it can digest almost anything. A dog's stomach is made for rough food, and even bits of bone, swallowed, can be dissolved in the juices that flow over it after a dog has gulped it down. So if you want your dog, or cat, either, to be healthful, give them their food, at least sometimes, right on the ground, without a plate or dish.

Lunch over, the boys played about for a while, or sat in the shade, for the day was hot, and then the trip was resumed. It was planned to reach the camping place early in the afternoon, to allow time to erect the tents and get the grounds in shape before night, and this

program was carried out. There were no accidents or delays, and about 3 o'clock Hen Marsh set up a sudden cry:

"I see the lake!"

A moment later this was taken up by the other lads who, like Henry, had glimpsed the blue water through the dark green of the fir trees, after which the lake was named.

"Yes, here we are!" said the Scout Master. "Pile out, boys, and we'll start on the tents."

The supplies had all arrived, and were arranged in an orderly stack near the unerected tents. The lads disposed of their belongings which they had brought with them in the truck, and, taking off coats, and rolling up their sleeves, they were soon busy.

In less time than you would have believed possible, most of the tents, including the large dining one and the smaller cooking one, were erected over the wooden platforms which had been down before the Scouts arrived. This was the former camping ground of different troops of Black Eagle Patrol, and most of the rough work had been done in advance.

So that before it began to get dark, or even dusk, "Camp Taylor," as it had been named

in honor of the Scout Master, was in pretty fair shape.

The cooking was to be done on a large oil stove, with an oven attachment, so it was not necessary to provide wood except for the picturesque camp fire, and this was done. Water for drinking purposes was "toted" from a nearby spring.

"May we go down to the lake and in the boats?" asked Chot of the Scout Master, for it was an ironclad rule that no boy was to go on, or in, the water without permission. Thus the lads were checked up, and the danger of drowning made less, since boys were forbidden to go in boats or swim alone. Help would always be at hand.

During the quiet evening that succeeded the bustle of settling camp, the lads rowed about the beautiful lake in the boats that had been provided, several being found tied to a little dock when they arrived.

Then, after a session of sitting about the cheerful blaze, talking, singing songs and telling stories, the Scout Master began to arrange for the night.

Each of the smaller tents held four single

cots, and in with Chot, Tom and Rick was put Hen Marsh. The four lads were regular chums, and this arrangement suited them exactly.

It was not to be expected that the boys would get to sleep early, when there was so much unusual excitement, and the Scout Master made allowances for this. But at last the final outbursts of laughter were stilled, and quiet settled down over Camp Taylor.

It must have been long after midnight that Rick was awakened by the barking of Ruddy. The dog had been given a place to sleep, on a bit of canvas, just outside his master's tent. Now his bark, not loud, but warningly, fell on Rick's ear.

The boy sat up on his cot, and, for a moment, could not remember where he was. It was all so different from his little bedroom at home.

But, as he looked out through the half-opened flap, and saw the lantern burning on the pole of the dining tent, and noted by its gleams the forms of his chums about him, Rick remembered.

"Oh, I'm in camp," he half whispered. Then, as Ruddy barked again in low tones, Rick whispered.

“Quiet, old fellow! What’s the matter? Don’t wake everybody up just because you smell a cat—unless it’s a wildcat!” and at this thought Rick gave a start. Suppose it should be some wild beast?

A moment later there was a crashing sound at the rear of the tent in which were Rick and his chums. And then through the back, in between the flaps, was thrust a big head, with great eyes and a wide-open mouth of large teeth.

“Oh! Oh!” cried Rick in terror, having only a partial view of this disturbing vision from the faint gleams of the lantern outside. “Oh, wake up, fellows!”

CHAPTER VIII

STRANGE NOISES

“**W**HAT’S the matter?” cried Chot.
“Is the house on fire—I mean the tent?” asked Tom.

“Who’s hurt?” demanded Hen Marsh.

The three tent-mates of Rick sat up on their cots and in the dim light that filtered through the canvas from the lantern that was kept burning all night, they saw Rick pointing at something in the rear of their own shelter.

“Look!” gasped Rick. And as he spoke Ruddy rushed in and began barking loudly.

The great head with the gleaming eyes and the rows of big, white teeth was shaken from side to side, thereby causing the tent to vibrate.

“What in the world!” began Chot.

“Why—it’s a—horse!” cried Tom.

“A horse?” questioned Rick.

“Just a horse! He’s stuck his head in through the tent flaps,” went on Tom. “What’s the matter with you, anyhow, Rick, to be scared of a horse?”

“Oh, a *horse*,” repeated Rick, still half asleep it seemed. And Ruddy, now that he caught the odor of an animal he well knew, and counted as one of his chief friends, no longer barked. For dogs depend more on the smell of objects, even their own masters, to identify them, rather than by sight. A dog has very poor eyesight, compared to boys and many other animals. But dogs have very keen noses, more sharp than even some of their kindred of the wild. And Ruddy loved horses, as all dogs do.

“What’s the matter here, boys?” asked the Scout Master, thrusting his head in the tent of our four “heroes,” and flashing on them the gleam of an electric torch he carried. “There must be no cutting up, you know; it isn’t fair to the other fellows. You’ve awakened some of them already.”

This was true, for about the camp, coming from the various tents, could be heard the murmur of voices asking:

“What’s the matter?”

“We weren’t cutting up, Mr. Taylor,” said Chot.

“Rick saw something, but it was only a horse,” added Tom.

“It came in the tent,” spoke Rick, half laughing, now, at his own fright.

“A horse in your tent!” exclaimed Harry Taylor. He opened the front flaps wider and stepped in. As he did so the horse, who seemed more curious than anything else, pulled his head back through the rear flaps, his hasty action nearly bringing down the shelter.

“Guess it’s some farmer’s horse that strayed out of the pasture,” said Chot.

“It gave me a scare all right,” admitted Rick. “Woke me up out of a sleep. First I heard Ruddy barking, and then I saw this big head right over me.” As a matter of fact the horse had thrust his head in directly over Rick’s cot. And the dim light, and being awakened from a sound sleep, accounted for the boy not at first recognizing the features of the equine quadruped.

“Hum!” said the Scout Master, smiling. “This might be called a sort of *nightmare*.

Well, go to sleep, fellows. It's quite some time until morning. I might as well lead the horse far enough away so it won't disturb us again."

He went outside and the boy campers could hear him tramping through the underbrush and leading the steed to some other browsing place.

There were no other disturbances that night and when the boys awakened and saw that a beautiful sunshiny day awaited them, there was much laughter and joking over Rick's "nightmare," as it was called.

There were a number of duties to be performed about camp, to get it "shipshape," before the lads could be allowed to do as they pleased, but when these had been executed to the satisfaction of the Scout Master, Rick and his particular chums Hen, Chot and Tom were allowed to go fishing.

Of course Ruddy went with them.

Several streams flowed into Lake Evergreen, which was as often called Evergreen Lake, and among these was one, almost a river in size, which provided good sport with rod and line. So, soon after breakfast (and never did a meal taste so good) Rick and his chums were scat-

tered along the shady banks of Spruce River, eagerly watching the green cork "bobs" to see who would first have a bite.

The boys were not yet scientific fishermen. They knew nothing about wet and dry flies, or the gentle art of casting. They were true disciples of Izaak Walton, however, in that they were in earnest. They were like the lad in the story of the bare-footed boy, in ragged clothes and a tattered straw hat, seated along a stream pulling fish after fish from it. Beside him sat a man with an expensive rod, a more expensive reel, a varnished box of flies and a creel—empty of finny beauties, however.

"I say, boy!" called the luckless man. "How is it you pull out so many while I can't get a bite?"

"Well," said the boy slowly, "the main reason, I reckon, is that I'm fishin' for *fish* an' you're fishin' for *fun*!"

But Rick and his chums were not only fishing for fish but also for fun, and they were rewarded with both. In turn they pulled out some fat chubs, a form of white fish that is delicious fried, a number of good-sized "sunnies," some perch and an occasional bullhead or catfish.

These last are good at certain seasons, but generally they have a sort of "muddy" flavor in the summer. In addition they have to be skinned, like an eel, and they possess sharp "horns" which make an ugly wound if you stick yourself on them.

However, all was "grist" that came to the hooks of the boys, and soon they decided they had enough to make a "mess" for the camp dinner.

"Let's go in for a swim," proposed Hen.

"'Gainst the rules," said Chot, as he wound his line around the pole he had cut from a willow tree. "Got to get permission."

"All right. Then let's leave our fish here in the pool, and walk back a ways and see if we can find anything," proposed Hen.

They had strung their catches on strings, through the gills of the fish, and to keep them fresh had put them back in a rock-rimmed pool at the edge of the river. There the fish could be kept alive until it was time to go home.

Preceded by Ruddy, who was having the most delightful time in the world, the boys tramped back among the little hills that sloped down on either side of Spruce River. It was a new coun-

try to the lads, none of them ever having been there before. It was a place of delight, with little glades and wooded patches, and beautifully plumaged birds, many with sweet voices, rose up on every side.

“Look out!” suddenly called Hen, as he saw Rick take a step forward. “Look out for that hole!”

“What hole?”

“That one right in front of you. You almost went into it. By that rock there! Looks like a groundhog’s!”

Rick turned aside and looked at a slanting aperture into which he had, unseeing it, almost slipped. It was a large opening, and looked exactly like the entrance to the burrow of some large rodent.

“That’s no groundhog’s hole!” declared Chot, coming up to take a look, while Ruddy sniffed at the edges.

“What makes you think not?” asked Tom.

“’Cause a groundhog’s hole is slanting. So’s a fox’s. This hole goes straight down. No animal could go down a hole like this. Besides, look at Ruddy. He isn’t bothering even to sniff at it, and if there was some animal that had

gone down it you'd find Ruddy digging to beat the band—wouldn't you, Rick?"

"Sure," answered Ruddy's young master. "I guess no animal ever goes down there."

"But what's the hole for?" asked Tom. "It must be something!"

Before any of the other lads could answer, or make a suggestion, they were all startled by a strange noise that came out of the hole. And the noise was like that of some deep, booming voice which pronounced the words:

"Gold! Gold!"

In wonder and amazement the boys stared at each other, and then at the mysterious opening leading down into the earth.

CHAPTER IX

THE FACE OF FIRE

“**W**HAT can it be?” whispered Chot.
“Did you hear it?” murmured Tom, approaching the hole.

“It was a voice saying: ‘gold—gold’ as plain as anything!” declared Hen.

“It sounded like it, anyhow,” remarked Rick, also speaking in a low voice as had his chums. Somehow low tones seemed to be the proper ones to use on this occasion, confronted, as the boys were, by that mysterious hole in the ground.

“The voice did come out of there—that hole—didn’t it?” asked Rick, as if in doubt.

“Sure!” chorused the others, speaking more loudly now.

“Unless some one was playing a trick on us,” suggested Tom, after a moment’s thought.
“There might be a sort of echo among the hills,

and it did sound a little like an echo. If some of the other fellows were hiding and yelling——”

“They must be down in that hole to have made their voices come out the way they did,” declared Chot. “And I don’t believe any of our fellows came over this way.”

“Tell you what!” suddenly exclaimed Rick, while Ruddy sat on his haunches near his master, waiting developments. “We can drop some stones down that hole, and see what happens. If it is any of our bunch that’ll let ’em know we are on to their trick!”

“Let’s do it!” agreed Tom, and the boys, forgetting their first fears in the joy of doing something—perhaps playing a trick back on some comrades—gathered up handfuls of stones. Approaching the edge of the hole, but not getting too near for fear of having it cave in with them, they tossed the rocks down. The hole was about a foot, perhaps more, in diameter.

“Listen, fellows, and see how long it takes the stones to get to the bottom,” suggested Hen. “Then we can tell how deep it is.”

Just how the boys could do this I do not know. Of course if they had known how rapidly

a stone falls in the first second of time, and how much faster it falls the next second, and had some way of keeping track of the number of seconds that passed from the time they dropped the rock until they heard it land, they might have been able to figure out the depth of the hole. But it would need a deal of mathematical work, beyond the usual powers of boys of their age.

“Let’s drop ’em one at a time,” suggested Chot. “You go first, Rick; your stone’s the biggest.”

Rick tossed his stone down the hole, and the others waited anxiously for the resounding crash that would tell when it had reached the bottom. They heard it strike against the sides of the shaft, or hole—rocky sides they seemed to be—but there was no separate, distinct thud to indicate when the chunk of mineral reached the bottom.

“Must be pretty deep,” said Tom.

“Let’s drop another,” said Hen.

This was done—they all dropped their stones—but they could not decide how deep the hole was. And then, when the last rock had clattered down, as suddenly as it had happened before,

came that deep, booming voice sound again. And once more it said, or seemed to say:

“Gold! Gold!”

In fright the boys stared at each other, and then they slunk away in silence—and Ruddy, in some strange manner alarmed, perhaps, by the actions of the boys themselves, also cringed away from that mysterious opening.

“Somebody’s down there!” declared Rick.

“We ought to go tell Mr. Taylor,” said Hen.

“Let’s!” proposed Chot, while Rick, speaking again, said:

“I know who it is!”

“Who?” chorused his chums, looking back toward the hole, when some distance away from it.

“It’s Mr. Slade! He’s come here to look for gold, just as Ethel said he would, and he’s found it!”

“But where is he?” asked Chot. “How does his voice come up out of that hole?”

“It comes up ’cause there’s a bigger hole, or cave, under that,” declared Rick. “His voice comes up like out of a chimney. That’s who it is—Mr. Slade is down there!”

“But we haven’t seen him or Jack or Ethel around here,” objected Hen.

“They must ‘a’ just come,” Rick went on. “I hope we didn’t drop any rocks on ‘em!”

“You’d ‘a’ heard ‘em yell if we had,” declared Tom. “But did Ethel say her father was coming here after gold?”

“Well, she didn’t say that—*exactly*, admitted Rick. “But she said he’d bought some land here and was coming up to look for *something*, and it must be gold.”

“Might be *silver*,” asserted Tom.

“Well, either one,” admitted Rick. “Anyhow, we’d better tell Mr. Taylor.”

The Scout Master only laughed when the boys told him what had happened, and what they thought had happened.

“I guess it was only the wind,” he said.

“The wind?” cried Rick.

“Yes. You probably stumbled on some old sink hole—a place where water used to run down. There’s probably an old water course under ground there, and it leads to that hole—perhaps to several others. The wind blows across the top of one hole, as you blow over the mouth of an empty bottle and make a noise.

The wind makes the same sort of sound. Then this sound traveled from one hole to the other, and sounded like a voice saying 'Gold' or 'Cold' or anything else you cared to imagine. You boys were thinking so much of gold that you took it for granted that was the word."

"Is there any gold around here, Mr. Taylor?" asked Hen Marsh.

"I wouldn't say there wasn't, but I never heard of any being found in this locality. It isn't a gold country. But we are going to have some boat races this afternoon, and you fellows had better get ready. That's a fine lot of fish you got," he complimented the lads. They had stopped for their strings of catches on coming away from the mysterious hole.

"Well, maybe he's right, and it was the wind," said Rick to his chums as they helped get the noonday meal. "But it sounded like a voice."

"It sure did," agreed his chums.

There was so much excitement over the impromptu boat race, and so many other forms of sport around the camp for the next week, that Rick and his chums almost forgot about the queer hole. They did not go back to it, and the

other fellows, accepting the Scout Master's explanation that the sound was caused by the wind, said they'd visit it some other time.

The boys hiked along the shores of the lake, and Rick and his particular cronies kept a lookout for any sign of Ethel, her father or the red-haired Jack. But the Slades did not appear to have yet come to camp at Evergreen Lake.

Ruddy enjoyed camp life fully as much as did Rick, and the dog went everywhere his master went with his chums. They were permitted to rove about as they pleased, within reason, but they must always tell the Scout Master where they were going, so he could keep track of them.

Late one afternoon, having gone on a tramp to a distant cave, and finding it very disappointing as regards size, Rick and his three chums, with Ruddy of course, found themselves, as dusk came on, more than a mile from camp.

"We'd better run," suggested Chot, when the shadows began to lengthen. "We'll be late for grub now."

"All right, let's run," suggested Rick.

They were among the hills—the same chain of low elevations amid which they had found

the queer hole a week previous, and the trail led downward to the lake and their camp.

Suddenly Chot, who was in the lead, stumbled as they were leaving a rocky defile. To save himself he put out his hand and grasped a bush that was growing on a little ledge of earth at one side of the rocky wall of the gorge. The bush came away in his grasp, and there followed a small landslide of stones, earth and other bushes and shrubs that had taken root in the shallow soil which found lodgment on the uneven surface of the ledge.

“Hurt yourself?” called Rick to his chum, while Ruddy ran up, barking, to know the cause of the excitement.

“No,” answered Chot. “But look! There’s a big hole! It leads into a cave, fellows!”

And, as they crowded around him in the fast-gathering darkness, they saw that when the bush had been pulled out it had taken with it dirt and stones that had filled up a sort of crack, or crevice, in the rocky side of the defile. And it was through this opening that the boys now gazed.

“It is a cave!” gasped Tom.

“A big one, too!” added Rick.

“Now we’ve got something to show the others!” cried Hen.

They stood in a group, looking into a black opening, the size of which they could only guess at.

“Let’s go in,” suggested Chot, starting to climb over the mass of earth, stones and crushed shrubbery that had fallen out of the crack, making the opening. “Let’s go in!”

Daringly, yet with no little fear, his chums followed. And as they stepped a short distance into what proved, later, to be a cave of considerable size, Rick gave a cry of wonder and fear and called out:

“Look! Look! The face of fire!”

The others gazed toward where he pointed, and there, seemingly staring at them from the black depths, was a grinning countenance of pale, flickering, waving flames!

CHAPTER X

IN THE CAVE

“**W**HAT is it?” gasped Hen Marsh.

“A ghost!” declared Chot.

“A giant!” said Tom.

Rick gave a short laugh, and pointed to Ruddy. The dog had run part way into the opening, and now stood, waiting for the boys to follow. They could just about make out his form.

“There aren’t any ghosts!” declared Rick. “And giants are jolly if you happen to meet any. There’s nothing scary about this, or Ruddy wouldn’t go in. You can depend on a dog when you can’t on yourself. Look, Ruddy isn’t afraid!”

“Well, it’s scary all right!” declared Hen. “Gosh! It’s making snoots at us!”

Indeed the face of fire did appear to be contorting itself at the four boys. There was no

doubt that it was a face of flames—at least the outline of the face, with big, leering eyes and a cruel mouth. There did not seem to be a body.

“Let’s go in,” suggested Rick. “I guess we’ve struck another cave, fellows. Maybe it’s got gold in, or something like that. Let’s go in!”

But Chot, Tom and Hen hung back. They were as brave as Rick under ordinary circumstances, but they did not like that grinning face of fire. Besides, Rick was the only one who had a dog, though, to be sure, Ruddy was equally friendly with all four lads.

“Go in? I guess not!” cried Tom. “I’m going to scoot back to camp and tell Mr. Taylor.”

“I guess we *had* better do that,” added Chot. “Maybe there’s tramps in this cave, and they’ve set fire to it. That’s what makes the face.”

“That face isn’t burning,” declared Rick. “It’s electricity, or something like that—not real fire. And it’s on rock, too. You can see the rocky wall.”

This was all true enough. But, even though the other boys were sure there was nothing ghost-like about the face of fire, they still did

not want to go in the cave, the opening to which they had discovered by accident.

“I think we’d better go back to camp,” suggested Tom.

“Well, maybe we had,” asserted Rick. “Come on, Ruddy!”

The dog came running out in answer to his young master’s whistle, and together the four Scouts scrambled from the defile and made their way to level ground. It was lighter out in the open, where a few last sunset rays remained, and the courage of the lads revived.

“What do you reckon it was?” asked Hen.

“Maybe a volcano,” suggested Chot. “Volcanoes have fire in ’em.”

“There aren’t any volcanoes around here,” declared Rick, who was pretty well up in his physical geography and natural history. “But we’ll tell Mr. Taylor about it.”

And when they reached camp, greatly to the relief of the Scout Master, who was beginning to worry, they told their story.

“A face of fire? Nonsense!” laughed Mr. Taylor.

“Yes, it was!” all four insisted, and they were so much in earnest that, after supper, a night

trip to the cave was decided on, to include all the Boy Scouts in the party, led by the Master, of course.

“Now, boys, be prepared for a surprise!” laughed Harry Taylor, for he had had experiences before in the exaggerated tales of too-easily frightened lads. “Where’s the face of fire?”

Rick and his three particular chums had reached the fissure through which they had looked shortly after sundown. And the surprise was more on them than on their companions. For there was no face of fire to be seen!

“That’s queer!” exclaimed Rick.

“What is?” asked the Scout Master with half a smile on his face, as some of the boys could see in the light of the moon, which had just risen.

“The face is gone,” went on Rick.

“But it was here!” asserted Chot.

“As sure as watermelons!” added Tom.

“Could it not have been the rays from the setting sun, shining in through some crack, and making the outline of a face on the rocky wall?” asked the Scout Master. “I have seen the sun play some queer tricks. Once I saw it so reflected from the surface of a lake, on the bows

of a motor boat, that it made the craft seem as if all ablaze. A crowd of us ran to the rescue, only to be laughed at."

"This was a real face of fire," declared Rick, and his three chums agreed with him.

"Well, let's take a look inside," suggested the Scout Master. "Whatever else you fellows did, you discovered a larger cave than any I've ever seen around here. Let's go in."

They were provided with electric flash lights—many of them—and these were soon glowing in the cave like so many immense fireflies. The boys who had seen the "face of fire" pointed out on the rocky wall the place against which it had been outlined, and Mr. Taylor went close to it, sniffing the air as he did so.

"Do you smell that, boys?" he asked.

"You mean like old fashioned matches?" inquired Rick.

"Sulphur, or, rather, phosphorus. That's what your fiery face was made of—phosphorus!" declared Mr. Taylor.

"But who did it?" came in a chorus from the Scouts.

"That's what we've got to find out," said the Master. "I can't believe it just happened.

There is no free phosphorus around here, I'm sure. Switch out your lights, fellows, and see if any of the face outlines remain."

Instantly the cave was plunged in darkness, and Ruddy set up a dismal howling until Rick called reassuringly:

"Here I am, old boy!"

The dog crept to him whining.

And then, as their eyes became accustomed to the gloom of the cavern, into which they had penetrated, they saw, faintly flickering on the wall, part of the outlines of the great face of fire! It was vague and indefinite, so that it was but the most grotesque caricature of a face now, but it was there, unmistakably.

"Well, you were right, after all," the Scout Master admitted to Rick and his three chums. "Some one must be playing pranks. We'll look further into this."

He switched on his own electric torch, an example followed by the others, and then Rick, looking down, saw that Ruddy had some white object in his mouth.

"Here, boy! Bring it here!" the boy commanded. He feared lest the setter might have

picked up something that had held phosphorus, and this chemical was poisonous, Rick knew.

Ruddy advanced, and dropped at Rick's feet a piece of cloth. The boy picked it up, and saw it to be a girl's handkerchief. There was a slight odor of perfume on it, that Rick could notice even above the rather sickish smell of phosphorus in the cave.

"Where have I smelled that before?" Rick thought. Then, suddenly, he remembered.

"Ethel Slade! She had some of that perfume on her when I led her out of our yard. And this is her handkerchief!" Unnoticed by the others, Rick examined the bit of linen by the light of his flash. In one corner were the initials E. S.

"What was she doing in this cave with the face of fire?" Rick asked himself, much puzzled.

CHAPTER XI

RIVAL CAMPERS

“WELL, boys,” said the Scout Master after a pause, during which the lads had wandered about the cave, not going far, however, from their leader, “I don’t see that we can do any more to-night. We had better be getting back to camp.”

“We can explore this cave again; can’t we?” asked Chot.

“Why, yes, I suppose so. Unless it belongs to some one who might object. We’ll have to respect the property rights of others, though I fancy no one will object to our coming here. If it is sufficiently open to permit some one to come in and make faces of fire on the rocks with phosphorus, I guess we can come and go as we please,” said Harry Taylor.

Rick was glad none of his companions seemed to be paying any attention to him and his dog.

He did not want to have to explain about Ethel's handkerchief. He had no idea how it happened to be in the cave.

"She must have dropped it—nobody else would be carrying her handkerchief," reasoned Rick. "And yet what was she doing here? I don't believe she would play a trick like making a face of fire."

Yet there was enough doubt in the matter for Rick to keep silent. He stuffed the slightly perfumed handkerchief in his pocket, and patted Ruddy on the head. His dog so often brought to Rick small objects, to be tossed away in order that Ruddy might have a joyous run to bring them back, that probably any of the boys who had seen the setter take Rick the handkerchief thought it was only another of Ruddy's pranks.

"Could we come back here and find some phosphorus?" Hen Marsh wanted to know. "Maybe that's what's so valuable in this cave," he added.

"I didn't know there was anything valuable in any caves up here," said the Scout Master. "Who says there is?"

"Rick," came the answer in a chorus from several of the boys.

“How about that, Rick?” asked Harry Taylor.

“Oh, well,” began Rick, somewhat embarrassed. “That red-headed Jack Slade said his father was coming up here to camp, and maybe look for something—gold maybe. His sister said something about it, too, but I don’t remember if she said gold or what. Anyhow her father bought some land up here and they’re coming camping, she said.”

“Is that so?” exclaimed the Scout Master. “I didn’t know any one was to camp here but ourselves. However, the woods are plenty large enough. But it can’t be gold Mr. Slade is after. It must be something else.”

“Maybe phosphorus!” eagerly suggested several of the Scouts.

Mr. Taylor shook his head.

“You don’t exactly dig phosphorus out of the ground, or find it in caves,” he said. “Though of course phosphorus is found in some rocks. It also exists in the earth, in plants and in the bodies of animals. But most phosphorus is made by burning animal bones, powdering them and pouring on sulphuric acid and water. After these have been mixed the liquid is evap-

orated and the dry mass that is left is stirred up with powdered charcoal. Then this is heated in an iron vessel and becomes phosphorus, which is collected under water, to prevent it bursting into flames. This phosphorus looks like white wax, and it must always be kept under water, or else mixed with some other substances, as is the case when matches are made from it.

“Phosphorus is very poisonous, though some of its compounds are used in medicine. However, I don’t imagine we’ll find any phosphorus in this cave, though some was brought here to be used in drawing this face on the rocks.”

“Mr. Taylor,” asked Tom, “isn’t that fox fire we sometimes see in the woods made of phosphorus?”

“Some persons call it fox fire,” answered the Scout Master, “though more common names are will-o’-the-wisp, Jack-o’-lantern and corpse candle. The Latin term is *ignis fatuus*, which means ‘fool fire,’ and that name was given because in the olden times persons were foolishly frightened by it.

“This ‘fox fire,’ as you call it, is often seen as a luminous ball in a swamp, or damp, marshy place, and is really caused by the presence of

phosphorus in decaying vegetable or animal matter. It may also be caused by swamp gases which have become ignited, though in that case I am not certain that there is phosphorus. However, we needn't worry about discovering any valuable treasure of phosphorus in this cave, for it simply doesn't exist.

“Now, then, let's hike back to camp. It is getting late, and we can come back and explore this cave by daylight much better. At least we can see the outside much better, for I suppose it will be as dark as a pocket inside here no matter how brightly the sun shines outside.”

Back to camp they went, Rick walking with Chot, Tom and Hen, while Ruddy raced here and there, following trail after trail of night odors—odors that came to him unnoticed by the boys. For a dog's sense of smell is much sharper than any boy's, and he can detect smells that are practically “invisible” to us.

So Ruddy ran on, pausing here and there as he caught the trail of squirrel, rabbit or other woodland creature. Several times he paused and barked and whined to attract Rick's attention. But this was not the time for hunting or

following any trail, however keen the scent, so at Rick's shrill whistle Ruddy came back. He was minding commands much better than the time he had run away from his master, on the occasion when Rick found Ethel in his yard.

"But what was she doing in the cave?" Rick asked himself over and over again on the way back to camp. "She must have been there. I wouldn't put it past her brother Jack to have drawn that face on the rocks to scare us, but would she do that?"

Rick could not answer that question with satisfaction to himself. He wanted to investigate further, and he was glad the Scout Master had said they would explore the cave again.

So, saying nothing to even his closest chums, Rick walked on with Ruddy, his fingers, now and then, touching the little square of perfumed linen at the bottom of his pocket.

Night in the camp of Troop 1 of the Black Eagle Patrol passed quietly enough after the excitement of finding the face of fire in the strange cave. Once or twice Ruddy gave a bark of alarm, but when Rick, or some of the other boys, got up to investigate, nothing of moment was discovered. On one occasion, though, after

Ruddy had barked unusually loud, there was wafted to camp the faint and unpleasant odor of a skunk.

“Here, Ruddy!” sternly called Rick. “None of that! We don’t want you to invite any pole cats to visit us. Keep off that trail!”

And I imagine Ruddy was very glad to do so. For the liquid ejected from a skunk, used as its sole weapon of defense, not only makes dogs ill, but may even blind them for a time, so powerful is the stuff. And once a dog has been sprayed by a skunk it takes many months for the odor to vanish. And even though it may not be noticeable on the dog in dry weather, let that same dog be out in the rain, or jump in the brook and—well, a long distance from the house is the best place for that dog until he is dry again. The dampness will bring out the smell almost in its original strength.

“A dog just naturally hates himself after he’s been sprayed by a skunk,” is the way an old trapper explained it to me. But we must not blame the skunk, for none of them will ever eject the fluid without giving two distinct warnings.

If ever you meet a skunk on a woodland path,

go out of your way to let it pass. If you should see a skunk stop, look at you and then tap with its forefeet on the ground, turn and walk away. That is warning No. 1. If you see a skunk turn its back on you and raise its tail, run away—don't walk. For raising the tail is warning No. 2.

Knowing something of skunks and their ways, how like kittens they look and play, when no danger is near, Rick thought it best not to let Ruddy take any chances. So the boy chained his dog to the tent pole for the remainder of the night.

As some swimming and boating races were planned for the next day, and as the day after some lads were to try for merit badges, there were so many activities in Camp Taylor that there was no chance, for some time, to explore the mysterious cave. But Rick and his chums did not forget the Scout Master's promise to lead them through it at some later time.

It was at the close of the third day of special camp activities, that, just before supper, Rick and his three special chums started on a little walk, along a path they had not yet explored.

It led up one hill, and down another, toward a cove of Evergreen Lake, and it was on getting a view of the blue waters of the lake through the trees that Rick also saw something else.

“Look, fellows,” he exclaimed. “There’s a tent!”

“Sure enough!” said Chot.

“They must be camping,” said Tom.

And as the boys looked down into the little glade on the shore of the lake cove, and saw the rival camp, a girl in a white dress came out of the tent and stood gazing off across the water. With a bark of recognition Ruddy sprang down the hill toward her.

“Here! Come back! Come back!” cried Rick, as he, too, saw who the girl was.

CHAPTER XII

GOING FISHING

RUDDY was a dog of two minds—he did not know what to do. He had seen, in the rival camp, a girl whom he knew and counted as one of his friends—a friend who kindly patted him on the head, pulled his ears gently and talked to him in the way that delights all dogs. On the other hand, there was Rick, his master, calling to him to come back. And Rick was too good a master to displease by disobeying.

So Ruddy stood, half way between Rick and the group of boys on one side and the new tents on the shore of the cove, for there were two tents in the new camp, as Rick and his chums observed—one at a little distance from the other.

“Come here, Ruddy!” called Rick, and slowly the dog turned and approached his master.

But at the sound of the boy's voice the girl, who had been looking out across the lake, turned and gazed up the hill. She saw the boys and the dog and cried:

"Oh, Ruddy! Ruddy!"

Instantly Ruddy cast to the winds all good resolutions of obeying Rick, and, in spite of calls to return, the setter dashed down the hill and presently was capering about the girl, and receiving her pattings and ear-pullings.

"Who are they?" asked Chot. "Ruddy seems to know 'em."

"That's Ethel Slade," Rick answered. "That girl who gets blind every once in a while."

"She sees all right now, I guess," ventured Tom.

"I guess so," agreed Rick, as he followed, with his chums, the path down the hill. He had called his dog back because at the first view he had known who the girl was, and he feared lest her red-haired brother might come out and kick Ruddy. But Jack Slade did not seem to be in the rival camp.

"Hello, Rick!" greeted Ethel, as the boy strolled up.

"Hello," he answered. Then, as the girl

looked expectantly at his comrades he mentioned their names in informal introduction.

“You got to camp first,” observed Ethel, and the boys noticed that her eyes were bright and shining, seemingly with no hint of blindness in them.

“Yes,” assented Rick. “Are you camping here?”

“Yes, father, Aunt Irma, Jack and I.”

“Jack?” exclaimed Rick.

“That’s his tent over there,” and Ethel pointed to the one some distance away amid a clump of trees. “He and some of his chums sleep there, but they eat in our dining tent. We have a cabin, too.”

“A cabin?” questioned Rick.

“Yes,” Ethel went on. “Daddy thought it would be better for Aunt Irma and me to sleep in a cabin, so he bought this one,” and she pointed to what the boys had not yet observed—a regular log cabin, well built and fitting in perfectly with the woodland surroundings.

“Daddy bought some land here, as I told you,” Ethel went on to Rick. “We’re going to stay here all summer, and so is Jack. Have you seen him yet?”

“No,” Rick answered. But he did not add what was in his mind—that he didn’t care to meet the red-haired lad.

“Well, he and Sam Small and Sid Osborne are living in that small tent,” Ethel went on. “We only came up three days ago. Daddy says he is going to prospect up here,” she added with a merry laugh, which showed how white and even were her teeth. “What’s prospect?” she asked.

“Looking for mines,” volunteered Chot.

“Well, I hope he finds a gold or diamond mine,” Ethel went on. “Jack and the other boys have gone fishing,” she said. “They wouldn’t take me. But you’re going to; aren’t you?” she asked Rick.

Rick blushed under his tan and said:

“Yes—I—I guess so.”

“Oh, but you *promised!*” insisted Ethel. “And I want to go very soon! I want to show daddy that I can catch a fish. Aunt Irma will cook it. There she is now,” she added, as a gentle-faced and smiling lady, in a khaki suit, such as the girl scouts wear, came to the door of the cabin. “Aunt Irma belongs to the Girl

Scouts," Ethel explained. "I'm going to join, too."

The aunt looked toward the group of boys and one dog surrounding Ethel, and then came forward, nodding pleasantly at Rick and his chums.

"This is Rick and that's Ruddy," introduced Ethel, "and these are Chot, Tom and Henry—Oh, I'm going to call you *Hen!*" she exclaimed with a merry laugh.

"Sure! All the fellows do," said Hen, blushing almost as redly as Rick had done.

"I'm sure I'm glad to see you," said Aunt Irma. "I have heard of Rick and Ruddy before."

"Yes'm," was all Rick could think to answer.

"You had better come in and put on your Scout suit," said Ethel's aunt. "That white dress isn't just the proper outfit for the woods; is it, boys?" she asked, making comrades of them at once. "You are almost a Girl Scout, so it will do no harm to wear the uniform," she told her niece. "Ethel just returned from a trip to the village with her father, which ac-

counts for her white dress," Miss Slade went on. The boys noticed, half hidden among the trees, an automobile.

"Don't forget you're going to take me fishing," called Ethel to Rick, as she followed her aunt into the log cabin.

"I won't," he promised, not daring to look at his chums.

"And bring Ruddy," she added.

"All right," agreed Ruddy's master, tossing a stone into the lake to hide his confusion, while the setter ran barking down to the edge of the water.

"She's a nice girl," Chot admitted as the four boys turned away from the rival camp and headed for their own.

"Not silly and giggling like most of 'em," added Tom.

"I wouldn't want to go fishing with her, though," said Hen.

"Why not?" demanded Rick.

"Oh, 'cause she'll scream if she catches a fish, and she won't dare put the worms on the hook."

"That's where you're wrong," quickly declared Rick. "She isn't afraid to do that."

“Well, if she gets blind all of a sudden, when you’re out fishing with her, what you goin’ to do?” exclaimed Hen, as if there were no answer.

“I can lead her back, same as I did before,” replied Rick. “But maybe she won’t get blind.”

“What makes her, anyhow?” Tom wanted to know, but Rick could not say.

The news of rival campers in the vicinity of their tents was received in different ways by the Boy Scouts. Some did not give it a second thought, but others pretended to sneer at girls and women coming to live in the woods.

“They’ll be hollerin’ around all the while that they’re seein’ snakes, an’ want us to come an’ save ’em!” declared Tim Blakely.

“I don’t believe they will,” said Chot, coming to the defense of Rick’s new friends. “If a girl isn’t afraid to put a worm on a hook she isn’t going to yell ’cause she sees a garter snake. And her aunt looks as if she could take a long hike.”

“She told my mother she once walked a hundred miles,” spoke Rick, for Mrs. Dalton had called on the new family in the brick house.

“A hundred miles!” cried Tim. “Get out!”

“I don’t mean in one day, but on a trip she

took," Rick explained. "She's one of the leaders of the Girl Scouts."

"Oh, that's different," Tim admitted, for he knew the good standing of that fine organization.

It was two or three days after this that Rick, finding himself comparatively alone in camp, his three special chums having gone off on a trip to work up points for merit badges, decided to go fishing.

"I'll take Ethel, too, if she'll come," he said. "Might as well, as long as she says I promised. And I guess I did. But I hope her brother isn't in camp. Come on, Ruddy!"

With a joyful bark the dog sprang up from where he was sleeping in the sun, and followed his master. Rick had a can of worms hidden away in preparation for the little excursion and soon, with his fishing outfit gathered together, he set out toward the rival camp.

"If I get a chance I'll ask her about the cave, and give her back her handkerchief," mused Rick, as he tramped along.

CHAPTER XIII

THE STONE THROWER

“**R**ICK and Ruddy! Oh, I’m so glad you came for me! Aunt Irma, I’m going fishing with Rick and Ruddy!” cried Ethel in delight, as she saw the boy and his dog coming down the slope that led to the lake cove, on the shore of which was located the cabin and tents owned by Mr. Slade.

Ethel wore a khaki suit, one in which she could “rough it,” as could the Boy Scouts in theirs. At the sound of her joyous cry her aunt came to the door of the cabin, followed by a man wearing stout shoes, knickerbockers of the golf suit variety and a corduroy coat. He had a gun over his arm, though Rick knew enough about the game laws to understand that this was not the hunting season. He recognized the man as Mr. Slade.

“I hope he doesn’t go hunting out of season,”

mused Rick, for with the other Boy Scouts he had been taught the wisdom and necessity of the game laws.

“So you’re going fishing, are you, Rick?” asked Mr. Slade as the boy and his dog approached. “Ethel tells me you are going to initiate her.”

“Oh, Daddy! I know how to fish!” the girl exclaimed with a laugh. “Jack doesn’t think so, but I’m going to show Rick.”

“Where is Jack?” asked her father, and as he looked to the lock of his gun Rick fancied there was a sterner note in the man’s voice as he spoke his son’s name.

“Oh, he and Sam and Sid went off together,” Ethel answered. “I didn’t ask them to take me. I thought you might come,” she said to Rick.

“I hope we get some fish,” said the boy. “I have a lot of worms.”

“Where are you going?” asked Mr. Slade.

“Just around in the cove,” Rick answered. “Our Scout Master says there’s good fishing right around here.”

“Well, don’t go too far away,” cautioned Aunt Irma. “Ethel isn’t—isn’t very well, but

she's a lot stronger and better since we have come to camp," she added.

"I'll get my pole," the girl went on, as she saw Rick's can of worms. "Oh, maybe we'll get enough fish for dinner, Daddy!"

"I hope you do," said Mr. Slade. "I'll be hungry when I get back."

"You'll be careful; won't you?" anxiously asked his sister as he started off with his gun. "Do be careful!"

"I will," promised Mr. Slade, and Rick wondered where Ethel's father could be going with a shotgun, when the hunting season had not opened, and would not for several months—this was midsummer.

"There's some mystery up here—the cave, the face of fire and finding her handkerchief in there," thought Rick, as he waited for Ethel to join him. "I wonder what it is?" and his fingers touched the little handkerchief in his pocket—not the pocket where he carried his knife, a whistle, some bits of cord and various odds and ends. Not that pocket! Rick had put the handkerchief all by itself in another.

"Now we're all ready," said Ethel as she

came out of the cabin with a three-piece lance-wood rod, almost like Rick's. They were not going to do any scientific fishing—these two—they were going to fish for fish. Their poles were equipped with simple reels, and Rick liked the fun of attaching a “bobber” to his line, to watch it duck under like a miniature submarine as a fish took the bait.

Walking a little way around the cove, hardly out of sight of the cabin and tents, Rick and Ethel prepared for several hours of happiness with rod and line. And in order that he might devote his whole attention to the sport in hand, Rick decided to get off his mind something that was worrying him. When they had taken their places on a shady bank, with Ruddy stretched comfortably between them, their baited hooks in the water, Rick drew from his pocket the little handkerchief and, handing it to Ethel, said:

“That's yours, isn't it?”

“Why—why—yes!” she exclaimed, looking at it in some surprise, and smelling it.

“Where'd you get it?”

“Found it in the cave.”

“What cave?”

“The one with the face of fire.”

“Face of fire!” cried Ethel Slade. “Rick Dalton! What *do* you mean? Tell me all about it! Is there a cave around here?”

“Two or three,” answered the boy. “But I mean the big one. That’s where I found your handkerchief. Ruddy picked it up. I knew it was yours by the perfume, and it has your initials on.”

“Yes, Aunt Irma gave me the handkerchief and some perfume for Christmas. I just love that smell,” and she put it to her dainty little nose again. “But how ever did it come in the cave, and what’s the face of fire?”

“I don’t know,” Rick answered. “I mean I don’t know how your handkerchief got there. But you ought to see that face of fire! It scared us all at first!”

Then he told of the adventure, while Ethel listened eagerly.

“Oh, will you take me to see it?” begged the girl.

“The face is gone,” Rick said, “but the cave’ll stay, I reckon. We’re going to explore it some day, with our Scout Master.”

“Oh, maybe he’d take me and Aunt Irma along,” Ethel said.

“Maybe,” ventured Rick. “Pull up!” he suddenly cried. “You’ve got a bite!”

To Ethel’s credit I must say she did not scream as I have heard many older girls do when they caught a fish. Almost as skillfully as Rick could have done, she reeled in her line and landed her fish, a good-sized perch, which was soon flapping on the grass.

“Poor thing!” murmured Ethel. “But I suppose we have to catch fish if we want to eat them.”

Then she strung her catch on an extra piece of line, as well as Rick could have done, and fastened the perch, thus secured, in a little pool of water, to keep alive until it was time to go back to camp.

“Pretty good!” complimented Rick, when Ethel had again baited her hook and cast in. “Where’d you learn?”

“Oh, daddy showed me. I’ve often gone fishing with him—that is, before we came here. Since he’s off prospecting he doesn’t get much time, and I don’t like to go with Jack—he always goes with such rough boys, and they tease me!”

Rick had his own opinion of Jack and the latter's chums.

"Oh, you've got a bite!" cried Ethel, as she saw her companion's green float dip under. And Rick's catch proved to be a large chub—one of the best he had ever landed.

"I'd like to get one like that," sighed the girl.

"Maybe you will," predicted Rick, and a little later Ethel had that luck.

The fishing was very good, and the two were so interested that they forgot all about the cave and the face of fire. Rick could not help believing what Ethel had said—that she had never been in the mysterious cavern—and her handkerchief, therefore, must have been dropped by some one else.

"But who?" mused Rick, as he carefully baited his hook with a wiggling worm. "Must have been that red-haired brother of hers, her father or Aunt Irma. But if they had been in the cave wouldn't they have told her about it? I give up! There sure is something queer about it all!"

"Oh, what an ugly fish!" suddenly cried

Ethel, as she suddenly pulled up her line, landing a flapping specimen on the grass at her side.

“That’s a catfish, or bullhead,” Rick informed her. “Look out for the horns.”

“A catfish with horns!” laughed the girl. “I should think they’d call it a ‘cowfish!’”

“They might,” agreed Rick. He took it off the hook for her, as a certain knack was needful, and she, evidently, did not understand bullheads. “You got to skin it instead of scaling it,” he told her.

“I’ll let daddy or Jack clean the fish. I *can* do it,” she quickly added, for, be it known, it is a poor fisherman who sets out to get a “mess” and does not prepare them for the pan. “But I don’t like the scales. They stick to your hands so!”

“Yes, like glue,” agreed Rick with a laugh.

By this time they had two good strings of fish in the little pool, and Rick was trying to judge, by squinting at the sun, if it were not nearly noon and time to go back to camp, when he was rather startled by hearing Ethel say:

“I—I think I’d better hurry back to Aunt Irma!”

“Why?” asked Rick. “Are you — do you——?”

He did not finish what he started to say, but she went on:

“My eyes feel queer, and I don’t want the dark to come when I’m so near the water. It makes me—makes me—afraid!” She almost whispered the last words.

“We’ll go back right away. I’ll carry your fish and things,” offered Rick.

“Oh, I can do that, thank you,” she replied. “It may not come at all.”

“What makes it?” asked Rick, almost before he thought, for he realized that perhaps Ethel might not like to talk about her blindness.

“Oh, it—well, it was partly Jack’s fault,” she said, “though he didn’t mean to. He was shooting his bow and arrow one day, and an arrow struck me in the eye. I s’pose I shouldn’t have been there when the arrow came down. Anyhow, it hurt one eye, and then the other got sore and I had to wear glasses—dark glasses.

“Oh, it was awful, with them on! And then I went out when the sun was shining on the snow. The doctor told me to keep my dark glasses on always in a bright light, and it was

very bright when the sun shone on the snow.”

“Did you take the glasses off?” asked Rick, guessing at what was to come.

“No, I—I didn’t—exactly,” Ethel hesitatingly answered. “But Jack was throwing a snowball at a dog, and he missed it and it hit my glasses and knocked them off. And the sun shone into my eyes and the snow was so bright that, ever since, it all gets black at times and I can’t see. I’m in the dark! But of course Jack didn’t mean it.”

“No,” assented Rick. But he wondered what would have happened, or, rather what would not have happened, if her brother had not tried to be cruel to a dog by hitting it with a snowball.

“The doctor says it will get over when I grow older,” said Ethel, “but it makes me feel funny when I have spells that I can’t see. And I sort of feel that way now, so we’d better go home.”

“Yes,” agreed Rick, “I guess we had.”

They were about to start off when suddenly a stone crashed through the bushes and landed with a thump on the side of Ruddy, who was



The scout brought the club down as hard as he could.

standing near Rick and Ethel, waiting for them to start.

The dog gave a yelp of pain and ran toward Rick, who looked angrily around to see who had thrown the stone which had landed so cruelly against his dog's tender side.

And then, with a sneer on his face, through the underbrush came Jack Slade.

CHAPTER XIV

THE VOICE IN THE CAVE

RUDDY no sooner had reached the side of his chum, protector and friend—by whom I mean Rick—than the dog turned, faced the red-haired lad and growled, showing his teeth. There was something so menacing and savage about the setter—usually so gentle and kind—that even Rick was surprised. Seldom before had he seen Ruddy act this way. But then, until the advent of Jack Slade, no other boy had ever been cruel to the dog; that is, since he had come out of the sea.

“Down, Ruddy! Down!” commanded Rick, and the beautiful animal, his brown eyes showing the effect of the needless pain inflicted on his spirit, as well as on his body, sought the eyes of Rick, as if asking:

“Why did he stone me?”

For a moment the group stood thus—Jack on the edge of the little clearing where Rick and Ethel had been fishing, the red-haired bully backed up against the bushes. Rick had started to spring forward and strike Jack when the dog came cringing back, and Ethel, with a strange look in her eyes, faced her brother.

“You—you mean thing!” she cried. “What made you hit Ruddy?”

“’Cause!” and Jack grinned. “He tried to bite me.”

“He never did!” hotly declared Rick. “He would have made friends with you, but you wouldn’t let him. He’s the best dog in the world! He’d make friends with anybody—but *you*, and now I’ll never let him! I—I’ll make him bite you—some day!”

“Oh, Rick!” gasped Ethel. “Don’t say that!”

“I will!” went on Rick, almost unreasoning in his anger. “I’ll make Ruddy hate your brother. And I’ll fight him, too! I—I’ll beat him as hard as I can. And if I can’t do it I’ll get some one who can. I’m not going to have him hurting my dog all the while!”

Rick’s breath was gaspy now—almost as

Ethel's had been, and there was a lump in his throat that would neither go up nor down. But his eyes blazed angrily as he held one hand on Ruddy's head, and shook his other fist at Jack Slade.

"I'll fix you for this!" threatened Rick. "I'll make you pay for hitting Ruddy! You wait!"

"I'm not afraid!" sneered the carrot-haired lad. "You keep your dog away from my sister, too!"

"Huh! She isn't a coward—like you!" snapped out Rick.

"Who's a coward?" Jack took a step forward, his hands clenching.

"You are!" cried Rick, undismayed, though Jack was taller and stronger than he. "Any fellow's a coward who hits a dog or any other animal when he doesn't have to. I'll fight you any time you want!"

Gently Ethel laid a hand on Rick's sleeve, while Ruddy, seeing this exhibition of friendship, wagged his tail in approval. And his wonderful brown eyes lost some of their fire of wrath as they turned from Jack to Rick.

"Don't, Rick," pleaded the girl. "It makes me—makes me——"



“Any fellow’s a coward who hits a dog”

She raised her hand toward her eyes, and Rick understood.

“All—all right,” said Ruddy’s master, in a low voice. “I won’t fight your brother—*now*.” The last word meant much. It was postponing the day of righteous, boyish judgment.

“Humph!” sneered Jack. “A lot I care!”

He reached down to pick up another stone. Ruddy growled and Rick, flinging off Ethel’s restraining hand, darted forward. But the red-haired lad only tossed the stone out into Evergreen Lake, where it sent the ripples circling and sparkling in the sun.

“You got to come back to camp,” Jack ordered his sister. “Aunt Irma said so.”

“I’m coming—but not with *you*!” the girl retorted. “Come on—Rick and Ruddy,” she called, and she smiled—for the first time since her brother had appeared on the scene. But now he slunk off, having delivered his message.

For a time Rick and Ethel walked on in silence, Ruddy now running on ahead and again dropping behind to trace the origin of some wild, woody odor that was a delight to his nostrils. In his wonderful dog way he knew he was safe and with friends now, and could run

whither he pleased without the danger of being stoned.

“Poor Ruddy,” murmured Ethel, as the setter paused for a moment near her. He wagged his tail in appreciation of her sympathy as she gently touched his bruised side.

“What makes your brother—that way?” asked Rick. “Does he hate all animals?”

“Pretty much, I’m afraid,” answered the girl. “He’s been that way ever since he was little. Daddy has tried to make him stop, and he’s even whipped him, but it didn’t do any good. Jack stones dogs and cats and—and—I don’t like to talk about it,” she finished, giving Rick to understand that the bully did worse things than that to helpless animals.

“I can’t see how anybody can hurt a dog,” murmured Rick.

“Nor I,” added Ethel gently. “Maybe Jack will get over it.”

“He’d better—before he hits Ruddy again,” exclaimed Rick. “If he doesn’t——”

“Please don’t fight him—if you can help it,” begged the sister. “Maybe—maybe if I talked to him, and told him what a good dog Ruddy is—maybe he’d let him alone.”

“Well, you can try,” conceded Rick. “But if that doesn’t do any good—— Here, Ruddy! Come back!” he broke off to call suddenly, for the dog had darted forward through the underbrush, barking loudly. Rick was afraid lest his four-legged chum might again encounter the bully. “Come back!”

Ruddy obeyed, crashing through brambles to the further disheveled appearance of his coat, and he was followed by Scout Master Taylor and a number of Rick’s camping chums.

“Oh, I’m glad it’s you!” Rick exclaimed.

“Why?” asked the Master. “Did you think it was the flame-faced phosphorus monster from the cave?”

“Almost,” said Rick. For to him Jack Slade, with his red hair, was typical of a monster who hated dogs.

“Say, you had good luck all right!” cried Chot, with a glance at the strings of fish.

“Pretty fair,” admitted Rick, justly proud.

“Did you catch those?” Hen asked Ethel.

“Every one,” she replied, also rightly boastful. “Didn’t I, Rick?”

“Yep,” he answered. “And she baited her own hook, too!”

“Good stuff!” commented the Scout Master. “We’re planning to explore that cave to-morrow, Rick,” Mr. Taylor went on. “We’re going up now for a sort of preliminary survey.”

“I’ll come along in a little while,” Ruddy’s master promised.

“Oh, you can go now!” quickly interposed Ethel. “I can go home alone. I know the way.”

“I got plenty of time,” Rick answered. “See you later, fellows,” and the Scout Master and his followers touched their caps to Ethel, a salute which Rick acknowledged in the same way as the two parties separated.

“Well, you did have excellent luck, Ethel!” her Aunt Irma said, as Rick and his pretty companion reached the Slade camp. “I never thought you’d do so well.”

“Rick and Ruddy brought me luck,” said the girl, smiling. “Where’s daddy? I want to show him.”

“He’s off—prospecting,” Miss Slade answered, and Rick wondered what this mysterious prospecting could be.

“Thanks, Rick, for taking me fishing,” said Ethel, as the boy and his dog started back for

their camp, after which Rick proposed going to the cave. "I'd like to go another day."

"So would I," Rick stated. "I'll call for you again. Come on, Ruddy!"

When Rick, having cleaned his fish, and put them in the camp refrigerator in preparation for supper, joined his companions and the Scout Master in the vicinity of the cave, Chot asked:

"What's the matter with Ruddy? He's limping."

"Oh, he—he's a little lame," admitted Rick, not caring to go into details about the stone thrown by Jack Slade. The dog had not shown any signs of limping at first. The stone must have struck a tendon, and have been thrown with more force than Rick realized. He hoped there would be no permanent results from the bully's cruel action.

"Maybe he's got a thorn in his paw," said Tom.

"Maybe," admitted Rick. "I'll look when we get back to camp. But say, what did you find in the cave?"

"We didn't go very far," Chot said, the four chums grouping together, while others of the Scouts ranged ahead or lagged behind, some

with Mr. Taylor. Rick had met the party coming back from the cavern.

“Couldn’t you get in?” Rick wanted to know.

“Yes. We found another entrance,” said Hen. “But Mr. Taylor, after he’d looked around, thought we’d better not go in until we had ropes and lanterns. It’s risky exploring an unknown cave, he said, ’less you’re prepared for it. There might be holes to fall in.”

“Say, maybe it’s an old pirates’ nest!” eagerly exclaimed Chot. “Cracky! Wouldn’t that be great! If we could discover a chest of gold!”

“No such dandy luck!” laughed Rick. There were many stories and traditions that Captain Kidd had buried treasure somewhere along the Belemere coast. And what was to prevent some of it being buried farther inland? Nothing in the world, if you were to believe the eager lads.

“We’ll make a visit to the cave to-morrow or next day,” decided the Scout Master in camp that evening, when Rick’s fish formed part of the bill of fare. “It seems as though it would prove interesting, even if there is no mysterious face of fire,” he added.

“I guess some fellows put that there for a joke,” decided Tom.

“Shouldn’t wonder,” agreed Mr. Taylor.

Because he had to supervise the activities of some of the lads who were trying for additional merit badges next day, it was not until the following one that the Scout Master could accompany the lads on an expedition to the strange cavern. At least the boys thought of it as “strange,” though the phosphorus face was the only mysterious manifestation so far.

“Ruddy all right again, Rick?” asked Mr. Taylor, as he walked beside the boy and his dog.

“Oh, yes, sir. It was just—he got hit with a stone.”

“Hit with a stone! Did some one—no matter. You needn’t tell me,” said the Scout Master quickly. He did not encourage tale-bearing. He knew if there was anything that needed telling Rick would not keep back the truth.

“It wasn’t any of our fellows,” Rick said. “Mr. Taylor, what makes some folks cruel to animals?” he asked.

“Well, it’s hard to say,” the Scout Master slowly answered. “I think it happens, in some

cases, because animals are not understood. Of course, ignorance is partly the reason. People don't realize they are hurting horses when they haul their heads away up in the air by means of the check rein. They don't stop to think that dogs and cats need cool water to drink. They forget that a horse who has been hauling a heavy load should be blanketed when he stops so he will not take cold. Those are matters of ignorance."

"No, I mean what makes fellows kick dogs and stone 'em and tie tin cans to their tails?" asked Rick.

"I wish I knew," sighed Mr. Taylor. "I can't understand it myself. It doesn't seem possible that boys, who are normal in other ways, can be cruel to animals, but some are. I think they might perhaps need something like a surgical operation," he added with a smile, "as the doctors say some criminals need it, to make their brains right. But I think most cruelty, Rick, is due to ignorance—people don't know that they are hurting the animal. And then some boys think it fun to see a dog half crazed by the can on his tail."

"This fellow knew all right," Rick murmured.

“Here, Ruddy! Come back!” he cried, as he saw the setter racing after a rabbit. Rabbits were not in season now, but of course Ruddy could not know that. He did not want to give up the chase, but Rick was urgent in his demands, and finally his dog came back.

“He’s getting over his lameness,” said the Scout Master.

“Oh, yes; it wasn’t much,” agreed Rick.

They reached the cave, going in by another entrance than that through which the flaming face had been seen. The boys were provided with electric flash lamps and in addition some stout sticks and a coil of rope was carried. Mr. Taylor was taking no chances.

“Say, it’s a big place,” commented Rick, when they were inside. “You can hardly see the roof.”

“Oh, it isn’t so large,” commented Mr. Taylor. “Our lights do not carry very far, that is all. The roof can’t be very high, for we entered almost on the level, and we haven’t descended much. Now keep together, boys. This may be only a simple cavern, or there may be branch tunnels in which you’d get lost. Don’t go too far away!”

They scattered about, discovering nothing unusual in the cave. It seemed to be hollowed out of solid rock, that material appearing on the roof, sides and ceiling—that is what few glimpses they had of the latter boundary.

“Well, I don’t believe we shall find much of value in here,” said Mr. Taylor, and he was about to propose that they leave when Chot and Tom, who in spite of the orders to the contrary had wandered off to one side, called:

“Here’s a sort of tunnel! Let’s see where it goes!”

The others of the party, led by the Scout Master, joined them. They found Tom and Chot at a point where a V-shaped opening led off from the main cavern, the wider part of the tunnel being at the bottom. In fact it was like a V turned upside down.

“Let’s go in!” proposed Rick.

“All right,” assented the Scout Master, taking the lead, as was his right and duty. “But watch your steps, boys. I’ll light the oil lantern,” he added. “That will save our flash lamps.”

One of the lanterns had been brought from

camp, but had not been used up to now; perhaps because the boys were so eager to use the more intense and easier-handled electric torches.

With the more generally illuminating rays of the lantern to guide them, Rick, Ruddy and their friends penetrated the cave tunnel. It led, winding this way and that, off from the main cavern, and not a lad but whose heart beat high with hope of what he might discover.

But after going in for perhaps two hundred feet Mr. Taylor, who with Rick was in the lead, came to a sudden halt. At the same time Ruddy barked, his voice being magnified almost to a lion's roar by the resounding echoes.

"What's the matter?" called voices from the rear.

"There's some sort of a light—or a fire—just ahead of us," answered the Scout Master. "Are all our fellows here?"

This was quickly ascertained to be the fact, by a simple counting process.

"Then it must be some one else also exploring the cave," said the Scout Master. "We'll go on, but——"

Then suddenly from the darkness beyond in

the V-shaped tunnel—darkness pierced only partly by the rays of the lantern, and by the glow Mr. Taylor had seen—came a voice saying:

“Don’t come any farther!”

It was like a warning of danger.

CHAPTER XV

A CLAMBAKE

SILENCE fell upon the group of Boy Scouts, as they surrounded their leader in the semi-darkness of the cavern tunnel. The echoes of the voice of the unknown died away, and then Mr. Taylor spoke, saying:

“We don’t want to trespass on private property, of course, but would you mind telling us who you are?” The Scout Master did not want it said, afterward, that he and his friends had been routed by some mischievous lads—perhaps Jack Slade and his cronies playing a joke.

“It doesn’t matter who I am,” came the rather sharp retort. “It is enough to say that this cave is private property, and that I am the owner. I am conducting some experiments. It may be dangerous, as well as unwise, for you to come farther.”

“That is enough for us to know,” said Mr.

Taylor courteously. "We certainly don't wish to annoy any one. I am a Boy Scout leader, and I was bringing the lads in for exploration——"

"That's all right—no harm done, and, later, I may open the cave to the public," said the voice of the unseen. "At present I desire to be alone."

"Come on, boys," called Mr. Taylor. "We haven't any right in here under the circumstances. Let's hike back."

He turned, while Rick whistled to Ruddy. The dog seemed to think it his duty to penetrate farther into the cavern, but Rick insisted on being obeyed. However, he had to go after Ruddy to make him come to heel, and it was thus when he advanced farther than the others along the inverted V-shaped opening that Rick caught a glimpse of a man with a lantern at the far end of the crack. There the cave seemed to open out larger.

Rick had only an indistinct view of the man, who had, undoubtedly, uttered the warning, and though he could not see the face the boy had a feeling that he knew the unknown. He had a brief glimpse of sturdy, thick legs encased in short trousers.

“Ethel’s father!” was the thought that instantly came to Rick’s mind. “That’s who it is! I wonder what he’s doing in this cave, and why he doesn’t want us here?”

However, it was no time to ask questions like that, so Rick, having taken hold of Ruddy’s collar, turned and followed the Scout Master and the boys out of the cavern.

As they reached the entrance there echoed from the black depths a dull, booming report.

“What’s that?” exclaimed Chot.

“Sounded like blasting,” said Tom.

“I believe that’s what it was,” the Scout Master said. “Probably some one is undertaking mining operations in the cave, and if they set off a blast—which it sounded like—it would have been dangerous for us to have remained.”

“What would they be mining for?” asked Hen. “Gold?”

“No, but aside from that I could only guess at it,” said the Scout Master. “However, the owner, as he said, may let us go in some other time. Now he has a right to keep us out, and we must respect his rights as we’d expect him to respect ours, if it happened to be our cave.”

“All the same I’d like to know what’s going on there,” said Chot.

“So’d I!” exclaimed the other boys.

Rick made up his mind to say nothing of his own suspicions. After all, he might be wrong, and it would not be pleasant to make a mistake

There was so much to do at Camp Taylor, with fishing, swimming, boating, going on hikes and cooking meals in the woods, that the boys paid less attention to the mysterious cave and its mysterious occupant than they would, otherwise, have done. Even Rick, at times, in the joyous fun of living in camp with Ruddy, found himself forgetting a resolution he had half-formed, of asking Ethel if she knew anything about her father being in the cave.

And as if these activities were not enough to provide good times at camp, Mr. Taylor one day made the announcement:

“Clambake to-morrow, fellows!”

“Clambake!” came the general cry for more enlightenment.

“Yes,” went on the Scout Master, smiling at the eagerness shown, “a camp like this, so near the ocean, wouldn’t be a complete success unless we had a clambake. So I’ve ordered the sup-

plies and they'll be here to-morrow. Get busy now, gather stones and plenty of wood!"

Not a boy but knew the delights of a clam-bake in the open—as different as one served at home, or at a hotel, as day is different from night. And at once there were joyous shouts as the Scouts made ready for one of the high spots of their camping experience.

While some of the boys dug a pit in which the bake proper would be "staged," so to speak, others gathered round, medium-sized stones, and still others garnered wood for the fire. The fire would heat the stones, and the stones would cook the clams and other good things.

"Where we going to get seaweed?" asked Rick, for, be it known to you inland dwellers, a clam-bake without seaweed is not a bake at all. But don't misunderstand me—the seaweed is not eaten. It is piled wet on the hot stones, and produces the steam without which the viands would be raw and uncooked.

"A wagon load of seaweed is coming with the other stuff," said the Scout Master. This clam-bake was his special treat to his boys.

The materials arrived. Clams, clams and then more clams, both hard and soft. There

were lobsters, too, and corn on the ear, with potatoes as a sort of side dish.

First of all, when the time came to put the bake in operation, a fire was started in the pit. In the midst of this fire were tossed the stones, there to heat until almost the bursting point. Fuel was kept heaped on the pile until at last Mr. Taylor pronounced the stones hot enough.

With rakes the embers and blackened wood were pulled away from the stones, and on top of the sizzling pile was spread the wet seaweed. Instantly a cloud of steam arose.

“Look out! It’s hot!” cried the Scout Master, as the boys ventured too near.

“I should say so!” cried Chot.

On this layer of steaming, hot seaweed was put a strata of clams. On top of them was piled more wet weed. Then came a section of lobsters, followed by more weed. Then ears of sweet corn, and potatoes in their “jackets.” On top of this more weed and then over all was raked another layer of hot stones. Again more weed was piled on, and then over all was placed a big piece of canvas, the edges being covered with stones and earth to hold it down tightly so no steam would escape. It is the steam,

generated by the wet seaweed on the hot stones, that does the cooking at a clambake.

“Well, now we can leave it for a couple of hours,” said Mr. Taylor when the tarpaulin was in place. “It can’t possibly burn, for the heat will remain steady for some time, gradually decreasing. There isn’t any fire to get hotter.”

The New England clambake, I believe, was the original fireless cooker, for it is on this same principle that this ingenious piece of household apparatus works.

“Oh, boy! Two hours from now!” cried Chot, rubbing his stomach in imitation of a dweller on a South Sea island who has not feasted for a week.

“Oh, la-la!” echoed Rick, and even Ruddy barked in joyous anticipation.

To pass the time until the bake was ready to serve, Mr. Taylor took his charges off on a hike, telling them about the various birds that were seen.

I can not say that any of the boys showed any great desire to acquire ornithological information. In fact, Ruddy was more interested in birds than was Rick, and Rick’s attitude was reflected in that of the other Scouts.

“Well, I think we may as well go back,” said Mr. Taylor, after consulting his watch.

“Hurray!” came the enthusiastic chorus, and the hike back was at twice the speed of that of the outward journey.

“I can smell it now!” exclaimed Chot, clapping Rick on the back.

“Oh, you lobsters!” voiced Tom.

“Green corn—on the cob!” cried Hen. “I can eat a dozen ears!”

“Be careful!” laughed the Scout Master. “It isn’t easy to get a doctor here.”

They reached the little hill from the summit of which they could look down on their camp. Their eyes sought the mound which indicated the clambake. But no sooner had the gaze of the Scouts rested on it than a wail of despair rose from every throat.

Some one had disrupted, torn apart and scattered all about the stones, seaweed and the choice viands, which were thrown here and there on the ground!

There was no clambake awaiting the return of the hungry lads!

CHAPTER XVI

THE DRUMMING PARTY

“**W**HO did it?”
“Jimminitty! This is tough luck!”
“Is it all gone?”

These were only a few of the expressions of the boys as they gathered around the despoiled bake. Even Ruddy barked dismally, for was not he to have had a share in the good things?

“Well, boys,” said the Scout Master, and he tried to accept the camp tragedy in as calm a spirit as possible, “some one seems to have been here ahead of us.”

“Who was it?” asked Hen.

“Maybe we can find out,” spoke Rick.

“If they’d only eaten it then it wouldn’t have been so bad,” commented Chot. “But they just kicked it apart!”

And that seemed to have been the means used to spoil the bake. The tarpaulin had been

pulled off, and the stones, seaweed and cooked viands raked away and thrown about. Some evidently had been eaten, for the empty shells of many clams were found, also some partly consumed lobsters.

“This sure is fierce!” exclaimed Rick.

Mr. Taylor was busily engaged in looking over the scene. Then he called out:

“Well, fellows, it might be a heap sight worse. I think we can save something out of the wreck yet. They didn’t dig very far down into the center of the pile. That hasn’t been touched, and the best part of the feed is there. Gather up the stuff that’s scattered, and put back what is clean and good. We’ll let the cold stuff warm a little and maybe we can get half a meal off it, anyhow.”

It was rather better than a half meal, as matters turned out. The vandals, in their haste, had torn away only the top and outer edges of the bake. The center and interior still steamed warmly. And when the unbroken lobsters, the unstripped ears of corn and some of the clams had been put back to heat again, there was almost enough for even the hungriest lad to eat.

But there is no denying that the bake was

pretty well spoiled, and certainly the edge had been taken off the fun of letting the Scouts themselves pull off the steaming seaweed, to delve among the cooling stones for the dainties cooked by their heat.

“It might be worse,” said Chot, as he dipped clam after clam in melted butter and consumed them with a look of supreme enjoyment on his face.

“It’ll be worse for those fellows who did it, when we get after ’em!” declared Rick.

“Who did it?” asked Hen, but he and the others also thought there could be but one answer to that question.

“Look,” said Rick, laying on the table near his plate a dirty pocket knife. “It’s Jack Slade’s,” he went on. “Got his initials on; and I saw it lying on his stoop one day when I took his sister home after she had one of her blind spells.”

“Jack Slade!” exclaimed Chot.

“And those fellows camping with him,” added Hen.

“They did it!” declared Rick.

“Let’s pay ’em back!” proposed Charlie Rubin, with a glance down the table to make

sure the Scout Master did not hear. "Let's pay 'em back."

"How?" asked Chot.

There were various answers. Some were in favor of asking the Scout Master to take some action. Others thought Mr. Slade should be informed, but the more radical cried:

"Drive 'em out of camp!"

"We can't do that," said Rick. "Their tent is on ground Mr. Slade owns. It's private property."

"And I don't believe in being a tattler," said Tom.

"Nor I," agreed Rick. "But there's one thing we can do."

"What?" asked his chums, for Rick was a lad known to have many new and original ideas.

"We can give 'em the rogue's march," Rick said.

"What's that?" asked Charlie.

"Well," Rick explained, "in the army camps, when a soldier does something wrong, they drum him out of camp. The other soldiers get tin cans, pans and anything that makes a racket and parade the rogue out of bounds. Maybe we

can't do that, but we can give Jack and his gang a drumming party."

"That's the stuff!"

"Let's do it!"

"Drum 'em out of camp!"

"Let 'em know we're on to their tricks!"

Exclamations, suggestions and cries of approval for Rick's suggestion followed thick and fast.

"Shall we do it?" asked Rick.

"Sure!" came the chorus. Mr. Taylor had gone down to the lake shore to read, leaving the boys alone for a while.

"All right," went on Rick. "Get all the tin things you can find—anything that makes a noise—and we'll give that bunch the rogue's serenade to-night."

"I'll make some wooden rattles," declared Chot.

"And I'll make some willow whistles," offered Hen.

"A couple of stones banged together make a good noise," said Charlie.

"That's what we want—noise," affirmed Chot, and so the drumming party was arranged.

Acting on the impulse of the moment, the boys decided not to tell the Scout Master what they intended to do. They knew they could all leave camp early in the evening, which was decided on as the time. They did not have to report back until 9 o'clock.

Quietly and secretly they made their preparations and gathered their noise-producing devices. Anything that could send forth a racket was taken, from two stones, which served as "tom-toms," to a large tin can, beaten with sticks.

If Mr. Taylor suspected anything when, after supper, the boys, one after another, deserted camp, he said nothing. They met at an appointed place and silently made their way to the tent where Jack and his two chums were camped. An advance scout, in the person of Hen Marsh, brought back word that the three cronies were just finishing their supper.

"Get ready, fellows!" whispered Rick, as he gathered his force about him. For fear lest he might betray their presence by an inadvertent bark, Ruddy had been left tied in camp, much to his grief.

"All ready!" announced Tom.

“Let her go!” whispered Rick, in shrill accents.

A moment later the drumming party gave vent to such an unearthly combination of noise and racket as was never excelled in those woods, and perhaps never equaled, save by a Chinese orchestra in full action.

CHAPTER XVII

THE STORM

STONES banged together after the manner of the South Sea Islanders using their tom-toms, the rattle of tin pans, the shrill tooting of wooden whistles, these, mingled with the weird cries of the boys, their calls of contempt and anger against Jack Slade and his two fellow campers—all this made a din in the woods near that shore of Evergreen Lake such as never had been heard there before, except, possibly, in the days of the Indians, when the Redmen started a scalping party out on the war-path.

So sudden was the audible attack of the drumming party that Jack and his chums, in their tent, were, for the moment, stunned into silence and inactivity. And then, as there came a pause in the racket, because the breaths of the Boy

Scouts gave out, Rick heard a girl's voice cry:

“Daddy! Oh, Daddy! What is it? What is going to happen? Oh, I can't see! It's all getting dark again! Oh, Daddy!” The voice trailed off into a heart-breaking sob.

Rick's own heart smote him. He had not counted on this. The weird, uncouth noises had frightened Ethel, and the sensitive, nervous girl had suffered one of her attacks of blindness!

“Gosh! That's too bad!” thought Rick.

He dropped the two stones he had been banging together, and leaned forward to call into the ear of Chot, next him, that they had done enough of the drumming, and had better stop. But at that instant the crowd of boys, having gotten their second winds, so to speak, after the first attack, went at it again, harder than ever, so that the din was redoubled, if that were possible.

And as the Scouts surrounded the tent of the red-haired lad and his two chums—fellow conspirators, Rick and the others fully believed—Jack, Sam and Sid rushed outside the canvas house, being plainly outlined by the lantern on the pole behind them.

“Hey, what's the big idea?” yelled Jack, his

face showing anger. He was heard by only a few of the drummers nearest him.

“Cut it out!” advised Sid spitefully.

“Go on, you clambake robbers!” cried Chot. “We’ll show you!”

“We’ll teach you to take our stuff!” added Tom.

“We’ll cut your tent ropes some night!” threatened Charlie Rubin.

I do not believe the Boy Scouts would, really, have carried out these threats, but there was some satisfaction in uttering them.

All this while Rick, who again heard the frightened cry of Ethel, was endeavoring to attract the attention of his nearest comrades, to get them to cease the racket. But his efforts went for naught, or, rather, his shouts and pawings at Chot and Tom as he made ineffectual grasps for their arms, were misconstrued. The lads thought Rick was urging them to greater efforts.

Jack and his chums, startled at first, were now angry.

“Heave stones at ’em!” shouted Sid.

“I’ve got a sling shot!” voiced Jack. “I’ll give ’em a taste of that with some BB shot!”

“Let’s rush ’em!” proposed Sam, who was a football player.

But as the three lads saw the size of the drumming party they thought better of doing any rushing. However, Jack did bring out a sling shot, made with strong rubber bands, and a formidable weapon even when stones were used; but much more so when leaden bullets were sent hurtling forth from the leather holder.

“Drop that, you—you skunk!” cried Chot, skunk being the meanest word he could think of on the spur of the moment.

“Try to put our eyes out, will you!” shouted Tom. He stooped and felt around on the ground for some object to throw. His fingers encountered a clump of fern and, tearing this up, he slung it with all his force at Jack, who was just pulling back the rubber of his sling shot.

“Thud!” The clump of fern with a ball of damp roots struck Jack full in the face. He staggered backward and fell down.

Then, as the noise of the drumming, the pounding of stones, the whistles and shouts died away, a man came bursting through the crowd of Boy Scouts, scattering them right and left.

“What does this mean? What are you rapscallions doing here? Get out! Don't you know you've frightened my daughter into hysterics?” this man cried. And Rick recognized him as Mr. Slade.

“What does this mean?” again cried Ethel's father, his voice hard with anger. He faced the boys, and in the light of the moon, which, just then, shone clearly forth from behind the clouds, Mr. Slade seemed to single out Rick. “What nonsense is this?” asked Mr. Slade.

For a moment no one answered, and then, as every one seemed waiting for Rick, his own chums remembering that he was better acquainted with the Slades than any of the Boy Scouts, Ruddy's young master stepped forward and said:

“We're drumming them up because they spoiled our clambake.”

“Spoiled your clambake!” spluttered Jack, getting rid of some of the dirt that had entered his mouth. “What do you mean?”

“You know what I mean!” said Rick sternly. “We started a clambake and went off on a hike. When we came back it was all torn up and partly

eaten, and we found your knife there, Jack Slade! Look!”

Rick held up the clew where all could see.

“I never was near your old clambake!” cried Jack. “Were we, fellows?” and he appealed to his chums.

“Get out!” scorned Chot. “Sure you were!”

“Tell that to somebody else!” jeered Tom.

“One moment!” sharply called Mr. Slade, and the boys became quiet at the tone of authority in his voice. “Jack, is this true? Did you spoil their clambake? What time did it happen?” he asked, turning to Rick before Jack had a chance to answer.

“This afternoon,” Rick stated.

“Then we didn’t do it!” cried Jack. “We were out fishing with you, Dad!”

A sudden fear and doubt came over Rick Dalton and his Boy Scout chums. Had they made a grievous error?

“If your clambake was interfered with this afternoon, boys,” said Mr. Slade, speaking more calmly, “then I am positive it was not done by Jack and his friends. I had all three of them out in the boat with me fishing, until just before

supper. About Jack's knife I know nothing, but it might easily have been dropped there at some other time, or, having been lost, may have been picked up by some one who did drop it at the scene of the trouble."

"That's right!" chimed in Jack. "I lost my knife two days ago!"

For a moment the two throngs faced one another with angry eyes. Then, as the truth of Mr. Slade's words was borne home to Rick and his chums, they realized what a mistake they had made.

"You should have made more certain, and have had better evidence to act on than mere suspicion, before you created such an unearthly din in the woods," went on Mr. Slade in crisp tones. "As it is, you have not only made an unjust accusation, but you have seriously frightened my daughter. And you had better leave these grounds. They are private. I shall see your Scout Master in the morning."

He turned away and walked along the path that led to the log cabin. No longer did Rick hear Ethel's frightened cry, but he could imagine her sitting in darkness, though there might be lights around her. And he might have pre-

vented all this! The boys would have listened to him. But he wanted revenge on Jack. Now it was evident that a serious mistake had been made.

Abashed and discomfited, the Boy Scouts started for their camp. They had dropped their tom-tom stones, their clashing tins and whistles. In silence they filed off through the moonlighted woods.

“Did you ever get left?” taunted Sid.

“Thought you were smart, didn’t you?” sneered Sam.

“We’ll pay you for this!” threatened Jack, as he and his chums turned into their tent to go on with their interrupted meal.

There was not much talking among the Boy Scouts as they made their way back. Soon the mournful and lonely barking of Ruddy fell on their ears.

“Well, *he* isn’t in bad, anyhow,” said Chot, grimly joking. “We sure did make a mess of it, Rick!”

“Yes, we shouldn’t have done it, I guess. But I thought sure Jack and those fellows spoiled our bake,” Rick said.

“So’d I,” remarked several others.

“What’ll we do?” asked Tom.

No one answered for a moment, and then Rick broke the ice by saying:

“We’ve got to tell Mr. Taylor.”

There was another silence, and then Chot, with a sigh, added:

“Better do it ourselves than have Mr. Slade, I reckon.”

“Yep!” came in mournful tones from his nearest chums.

The Scout Master looked surprised and hurt when the tale was haltingly told him. He had been out on the lake alone for a moonlight row, and though he had heard the drumming concert he had thought it just some general fun on the part of the boys.

“Well,” he said at length, “it’s done and can’t be undone. I’m particularly sorry on that little girl’s account.”

So was Rick, and so were his chums. It did not so much matter about Jack, Sid and Sam. They could stand having their feelings ruffled, though, of course, it was not pleasant to be wrongly accused, and that is what it amounted to.

“You’ll have to apologize, naturally,” said

the Scout Master. "That's the least and the most honorable thing to do. I'll see Mr. Slade and his daughter, and explain, and you boys must do the rest."

That was only fair, Rick and his chums admitted, but they knew it would not be easy. One or two of them had been obliged, at one time or another, to get up before the class in school and mumble: "I did wrong and I'm sorry for it!"

"You shouldn't have acted on the basis of such a slender clew," went on the Scout Master. "It may have been some vindictive tramps who despoiled the clambake."

Rick and his chums had not thought of that.

"However, you did not mean to do wrong," Mr. Taylor said, "though it so resulted, and the effect was the same as though you had acted with intention. You are going to do the honorable thing by apologizing, and that will wipe the slate clean as far as is possible. I won't say anything about not telling me, for——"

"We know we did wrong there, too," said Rick quickly.

"Yes, you did," said the Scout Master

frankly. "You are here in my charge, and I have a right to be told of any unusual actions you contemplate. However, I'll overlook it this time, and I won't even say 'don't do it again,' for I know you will not," and he smiled at the boys in his own peculiar, engaging manner.

"Three cheers for Mr. Taylor!" called Chot.

And the woods resounded to the echoes of quite a different din than that made by the drumming party.

"Well, Ruddy, old boy," murmured Rick, as he released his dog from where he had been tied, "maybe it would have been better if we'd taken you with us. We might not have surprised Jack, and the drumming might not have happened, and then we wouldn't be in so badly as we are now. But I guess it had to be! Only I hope Ethel doesn't stay blind long. That's tough!"

It was Mr. Taylor's intention to have his Boy Scouts go to the other camp in a body next day, and make a proper apology, but before morning broke he and several of the lads were awakened in their tents by the breaking of a storm. The wind sprang up suddenly and in a short time it was raining hard.

“Loosen tent ropes!” cried the Scout Master.

“I should think it would be better to tighten 'em,” sleepily said Tom, as he and Rick turned out with Chot and Hen.

“Gosh, no!” Rick cried. “Don't you know water shrinks the tent ropes, and if they shrink too much they'll pull out the pegs and the tents will come down?”

“Oh, that's so,” admitted Tom. “I forgot.”

Hastily donning rubber coats, the Scout Master and his charges soon slipped the ropes so that the danger described by Rick would not develop. Then they went back to bed, but not to sleep much, for the storm steadily grew worse. It was still raining hard when the boys got up for breakfast.

However, provision had been made for such unkindness on the part of the elements, for when Mr. Taylor brought his lads to camp he knew all the days would not be fair. So, though the usual activities were curtailed, there was no lack of comforts in the way of meals. The cooking and dining tents did not leak, and the boys had rubber boots and coats.

“Let's go fishing,” proposed Chot, about the

middle of the afternoon, when time had begun to drag. "They say fish bite best in the rain."

"The wind's too high," declared Rick. "Look at the pond."

It was indeed rough out on Evergreen Lake, the waves reaching a height that would be unsafe for small boats.

"We can fish from shore," urged Chot. "Come on, let's ask Mr. Taylor."

"Anything's better than staying cooped up here," added Tom.

Rick was about to agree with this, and the boys had started from their tent to go to that of the Scout Master, when they saw stalking through the downpour Mr. Slade. He seemed in a hurry and rather anxious, and Rick and his particular chums saw him encounter Mr. Taylor in front of the latter's tent.

"You have a motor boat; haven't you?" they heard Mr. Slade ask the Scout Master.

"Yes," was the answer. "Is anything the matter?"

Rick's first thought was that Ethel needed a doctor, but a moment later he heard her father say:

“My boy and his chums went off before dinner in our motor boat and haven’t returned. The storm is getting so bad I’m a bit anxious. I was wondering if I could ask for the loan of your craft?”

“Certainly,” replied Mr. Taylor promptly. “It’s the least we can offer after the trouble of last night. We’ll discuss that later. I’ll go with you, and have some of our boys come along. Your son’s craft may be in some cove disabled. Just a minute, Mr. Slade.”

The Scout Master looked through the mist of the downpour and saw Rick and his three chums outside their tent.

“Come on, boys!” he called. “We’re going to look for some storm-bound navigators,” and his voice was cheerful, perhaps to give heart to Mr. Slade. For certainly it was perilous for a small craft on Lake Evergreen in the storm that was now raging.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN STRESS OF WATERS

BOBGING at the wharf to which she was tied, the *Black Eagle*, Mr. Taylor's own private motor boat, awaited, anxiously it seemed, the boarding of her by Rick and his chums. The Scout Master had recently brought his own craft to the camp and many a trip the boys had taken in her. She was a sturdy boat, though not as fast as the *Ethel*, which was the name of the motor boat owned by Mr. Slade. Jack and his chums had been allowed to use the *Ethel* several times, and more than once they had taunted the occupants of the *Black Eagle* when they left her behind on the way to the Point to get the mail.

“I told my boy and his chums not to go too far out, for I thought the storm would get worse,” said Mr. Slade, as he accompanied the Scout Master down to the dock. “But it seems

they didn't mind, and when I returned, after having been out for a while, and Ethel told me her brother hadn't come back, I grew anxious."

"Naturally," commented Mr. Taylor, who was, with the help of the boys, taking the tarpaulin covers off the cockpit of the *Black Eagle*. This tarpaulin could be raised on movable uprights and used as a sun awning, or a protection against the rain. And it was the intention of Mr. Taylor so to utilize it now.

"It's too bad to make you go out in this storm," went on Mr. Slade, "but I didn't know what else to do—there aren't any other motor boats on this side of the lake just now and——"

"Oh, that's all right," cheerfully said Mr. Taylor. "That's what Boy Scouts are for—to do good turns. And I want to tell you, Mr. Slade, that if it hadn't been for this storm my boys would have been over in a body, this morning, to apologize for their drumming party."

"That's right," said Chot, for it seemed to be "up to" him and the others to say something.

"Oh, we'll forget that," Mr. Slade remarked. "I was a little provoked at first, but, as a matter of fact, I wouldn't have been surprised if

I had learned that Jack had had a hand in that mischief. He is a bit wild—if his mother had lived——”

The wind caught the *Black Eagle* then, and seemed anxious to set her adrift before the party had gotten aboard, and Mr. Slade did not finish what he was saying, for he gave a hand to holding the boat against the sheltered side of the dock.

“Is Ethel all right now?” asked Rick, trying to keep Ruddy from jumping into the boat.

“Very nearly so. Any nervous shock seems to affect her eyes, and make her temporarily blind. We hope she will get all over that some day, but it takes quite a while. The noise frightened her.”

“We’re sorry,” faltered Rick.

“Have you any idea which way your boys went, Mr. Slade?” asked the Scout Master, as he took his place at the motor to throw on the ignition switch and let down the oil cup levers.

“No, I can’t say. The last glimpse I had of them before I went to the ca—— before I went out,” and Mr. Slade seemed on the verge of saying something and then quickly changing his mind; a fact which Rick wondered if any-

one else besides himself noticed. "The last I saw of them they were over near the small cove—where you and Ethel were fishing," he said to Rick.

"Well, we'll try down that way," Mr. Taylor said, as he started the motor, which, fortunately, seemed to be disposed to be on its good behavior. "It's so misty you can't see more than a few hundred feet. Get aboard, boys!"

"Go back, Ruddy!" ordered Rick, as the setter tried to climb into the boat.

"Oh, let him come!" begged Chot. "There's lots of room!"

"Yes, let him come," assented the Scout Master. "He's a sort of water dog anyhow; isn't he, Rick?" he asked, for he knew the story of Ruddy.

"He came out of the sea," the boy admitted, as he patted the wet head of his four-footed chum.

"Whew! It is rough!" exclaimed Mr. Taylor as he guided the *Black Eagle* out beyond the shelter of the dock, and there felt the full force of the wind and rain.

"Big waves!" commented Rick, as one crashed up against the curving bow of the craft,

and, breaking, sent a shower of spray over all on board. But they were dressed for this sort of weather, and the boys fairly shouted with delight at the idea of battling with the elements.

Mr. Taylor had faith in his craft, which was powerful and staunch, if not speedy, and with sure hands he guided her out into the lake, keeping her head well up into the teeth of the wind, so that the waves broke evenly against the bow.

Ruddy lay at his master's feet, more sheltered than any of the boat's crew, for Rick spread a piece of canvas over his dog's back; not that Ruddy minded rain, for he was in the water almost as much as he was out when with the boys at the lake.

On chugged the *Black Eagle* and once she was well out from shore the full and gripping force of the storm was felt. At times the wind was so strong that it seemed fairly to stop the boat in her course. Fortunately the bows were exceptionally high, or more water might have come aboard than would have been pleasant, or safe.

“I don’t like this! I don’t like it at all,” said Mr. Slade to himself, half aloud. “Foolish boys to go out in such a storm!”

As the *Black Eagle* fought her way around Chestnut Point and down toward the cove and no glimpse was had through the driving, pelting rain of the *Ethel* and her three occupants, Rick and his chums began to fear for the worst.

“We’d better stop and ask those in any boats we see if they have noticed Jack and his chums,” suggested Mr. Slade, when the *Black Eagle* had circled the cove, without glimpsing the missing ones.

“Yes,” agreed Mr. Taylor. “That will be a good plan. I don’t fancy many are out, though, that don’t have to be, except the regular steamers.”

There were several of these plying back and forth across and up and down the lake, taking cottagers and campers to and from the stores or the Landing where the railroad station was located. But these steamers were of large size and it would be no easy matter to stop them in the storm to make inquiries.

All small craft, including the green fishing

boats of the most persistent disciples of Izaak Walton, seemed to have run for shelter if, indeed, any had ventured out that morning. Lake Evergreen appeared to be deserted. They did see two of the larger steamers on the far side of the lake, too distant to hear a hail.

“We’ll just cruise about,” suggested the Scout Master. “They may be floating almost anywhere if their engine gave out.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of,” said Mr. Slade. “It was a cranky motor at best. But they’d be blown before the wind, wouldn’t they?”

“Yes, I suppose so,” agreed Mr. Taylor. “We’d better look for them at the lower end of the lake. I’ll give some whistles and see if we can get a response.”

The *Black Eagle* was equipped with a compressed air whistle, and this was soon sending out shrill blasts, telling to those who might hear that she was on her way to the rescue.

But listen and strain their ears as they did, the occupants of the Scout craft could hear no answering whistle. The only sounds were the howling of the wind, the swish of rain and the hiss as the waves slammed up against the boat’s bow, parted and raced alongside, as though

angry at being cheated in their effort to climb aboard.

“Keep your eyes peeled, fellows!” called the Scout Master, wiping the rain drops off his face.

“I see something!” suddenly cried Chot. “Looks like a boat turned upside down!”

Mr. Slade gave a gasp, and Chot was sorry he had spoken so definitely. But a moment later Tom shouted:

“It’s only a log!”

“Yes,” agreed Mr. Taylor, after an inspection. “Only a log,” and he knew the thankfulness that was in Mr. Slade’s heart.

On and on chugged the *Black Eagle*. Now and again the Scouts would raise a shout, and the whistle tooted at intervals. They had gone down the lake a considerable distance, and Mr. Taylor was thinking of sending out a general alarm, so that more craft would look for the missing boys, when Rick suddenly sprang to his feet and cried:

“Look! Isn’t that the *Ethel*?”

He pointed to something more like an indistinct blur in the storm than a boat, but it was a blur that did not fade away as several other

similar ones had done, thus blasting hopes.

“It does look like a boat,” said Mr. Taylor.

“Hello, Jack!” cried Mr. Slade, making a megaphone of his hands and aiming it at the indistinct mass about a quarter of a mile away.

“Hello, Jack!”

They all listened eagerly, but no answering hail came back.

“We couldn’t hear against this wind, anyhow,” said the Scout Master. “If that’s a boat—and there is any one in it—they might hear us, but we couldn’t hear them. I’ll head for it.”

He swung the *Black Eagle* around and gave her the last notch of the throttle control lever. On she sped and then Rick, peering through the rain, gave a joyful cry!

“It is the *Ethel!*” he shouted, “and all three of ’em are aboard! There they are!”

Ruddy added his barks to Rick’s joyful call, and Mr. Slade murmured a prayer of thanks. But an instant later there came a terrific blast of wind, a big wave struck the *Black Eagle* on her beam, filling the cockpit with water and the faces of all on board with blinding spray.

When their vision was cleared, and it was realized that the Scout boat was in no actual distress all eyes turned toward where they had seen the *Ethel*.

She had disappeared!

CHAPTER XIX

UP A TREE

“**W**HERE are they?” cried Mr. Slade, dashing his hand across his eyes as if to make sure he really had his sight. “Where did they go? What happened?”

“I think they must have capsized!” shouted Mr. Taylor, above the howling of the wind, the swish of rain and the slashing of the waves against the sides of the *Black Eagle*. “That last blast turned her over! The boys are in the water! Look sharp, everybody!” he commanded. “We must pick them up!”

The Boy Scouts scanned the heaving, foam-capped water in all directions, and their eyes were not less eager or anxious than those of Mr. Slade to discover a trace of his son and Jack’s luckless companions.

Ruddy, too, seemed imbued with the spirit of help. He watched every move Rick made

and when the lad sprang to the side of the motor boat, to peer over into the swirling waters, Ruddy was beside his young master, his paws on the gunwale, looking over the side also.

Suddenly, as Rick gazed, he saw what at first he thought was a black ball bobbing about in the water. Then something white showed in connection with the ball and Rick realized that it was a human head and face he was looking at.

“Here’s one of ’em!” Rick cried. “Here’s one!”

The bobbing head of one of the shipwrecked lads—which one Rick could not tell—was swept nearer the side of the *Black Eagle*. Chot, who had moved up beside Rick, now stood close to him and Ruddy.

“We’ll get him!” shouted Chot, for he saw that the bobbing head was drifting within reach. Perhaps the boy to whom it belonged was swimming, but if so he was not helping himself much, either through weakness, inability or because of the roughness of the water.

“Grab him!” cried Chot to Rick as the floating, struggling lad came almost within reach. Rick and Chot did their best, but a drifting

movement of the *Black Eagle*, the engine of which had been shut off, caused the craft to put some distance between her and the floating lad.

He was out of the reach of Rick and Chot. But an instant later Rick shouted:

“Get him, Ruddy!”

It was the signal the dog had been waiting for! To him it was like some game he and Rick had often played—the game of throwing sticks into the lake to be brought out by the setter. Only this was a more desperate game.

With a bark, perhaps to show his delight at getting into action, perhaps to encourage the unfortunate lad in the water, Ruddy sprang overboard, and, a few seconds later, swimming as he had never swam before, he had grasped the shipwrecked one by the collar.

“Fetch him here, Ruddy! Fetch him here!” cried Rick.

“Oh, he’s got him!” shouted Chot. “Good dog!”

Meanwhile, on the port side of the boat other things were happening. As soon as he realized that the *Ethel* had been swamped Mr. Taylor, casting off his shoes and coat, dived overboard and began to swim in the direction where the

missing craft was last seen. He knew his own boat was in no particular danger, since he had stopped the motor, and the *Black Eagle* was staunch enough to live even if she fell into the trough of the waves.

“I’m with you!” cried Mr. Slade, as, casting off some of his garments, he followed Mr. Taylor overboard. And each of them was fortunate enough to grasp a shipwrecked camper, though the identities were not clear at first. Mr. Slade did not know whether he had hold of his own son or not.

However, he knew that he had in his grasp a half-drowned and very much frightened lad, and, like the Scout Master, he struck out with all his strength for the safe haven of the motor boat.

“Pull him in, boys!” called Mr. Taylor to Hen and Tom, as he reached the swaying, heaving craft with his burden. “Pull him in!”

Thus Sid Osborne was hauled over the gunwale, a very limp and half-unconscious lad.

By this time Ruddy had brought the youth he had saved near enough so that Rick and Chot could reach over and lift him in, which they did.

“Sam Small!” exclaimed Rick, as he recognized the rescued one.

“Where’s Jack Slade?” asked Chot, for by this time it was made clear that the boy the Scout Master had saved was Sid.

Before any one could answer the question, Mr. Slade swam up with his son, and the limp form of Jack was hauled aboard. Then brave Ruddy was lifted in, to be received with cheers by his friends, while Rick threw his arms about his dog’s neck and silently hugged him.

“This is luck, indeed—all three saved!” cried Mr. Taylor. “Now we’d better get back to camp.”

“Can’t you—can’t we get the *Ethel*?” gasped Jack, who being a better swimmer than either of his companions, was not in such distress from having swallowed too much water.

“The *Ethel* is sunk,” said his father. “You may be thankful you are alive, and you wouldn’t be if Mr. Taylor and his boys hadn’t helped me with the rescue. The *Ethel* is at the bottom of the lake!”

Jack looked woebegone enough to prohibit any further censure then. And while Mr. Taylor started the motor, and turned the boat’s

bow back toward the dock, Mr. Slade and the Boy Scouts made Sid, Jack and Sam as comfortable as possible.

In spite of the fact that it was summer, the storm was a cold one, and the shock of being tossed suddenly into the water had so unnerved all three shipwrecked lads that they shivered with chill and fear. They were wrapped in canvas pieces, and huddled together for warmth. Fortunately the *Black Eagle* was a broad-beamed boat and roomy fore and aft, so there was space for the rescued ones.

A little later, after battling against the ever-increasing storm, the *Black Eagle* was made fast to the dock, and there Aunt Irma and Ethel, who had been anxiously and tearfully waiting, received the news that all three rash lads had been saved.

“I don’t care if the boat is sunk, as long as you didn’t drown, Jack,” his sister said, putting her arms around him.

“Perhaps we can salvage the boat,” suggested Mr. Taylor. “We’ll have a look after this storm.”

“That part of the lake is rather deep,” said Mr. Slade. “I don’t believe it will be much use

to try. I can't thank you and your boys now, Mr. Taylor," he went on, and his voice was husky as he gripped the hand of the Scout Master. "But I think you know how I feel."

"Of course," murmured Mr. Taylor. "Better get the boys into dry clothes, or they might take cold. I can lend you some extra suits if they haven't any."

"Thank you, but I think they have."

"I'll make them some hot lemonade," offered Ethel. She seemed to have gotten over the fright caused by the drumming party, of which Rick could not think without an uncomfortable feeling.

So Mr. Slade herded his son and the latter's dripping companions up the hill and over toward their camp, while Mr. Taylor, having instructed his Scouts to make fast the *Black Eagle*, went to his tent to don dry clothes.

And the remainder of the day was spent by Rick and his chums in discussing what had happened, and in singing the praises of Ruddy, a dog loved, loving and altogether extraordinary in the opinions of his master and his master's friends.

It stormed for three days, and during that

time you can easily guess, even if you have not been lucky enough to go camping, that it was not overly pleasant in the woods. However, the Boy Scouts had learned, or were learning, to take the bad with the good, and they knew the sun would shine sooner or later—which it did, toward the close of the third day.

“We’ll dry out to-morrow,” said Mr. Taylor. And the next day, when Old Sol blazed down as if to make amends for his long absence, tents were opened top and bottom, damp blankets and garments were hung up to dry and there was a general slicking up of camp.

Jack and his two chums were observed to be rowing about the place where the *Ethel* had gone down, and they made futile attempts to grapple for her with improvised hooks on the ends of ropes. Mr. Taylor and his Scouts also visited the place, endeavoring, by means of a water telescope (a wooden water pail with a square of glass set in the bottom) to get a view of the wreck on the bottom of Lake Evergreen. But they either miscalculated the location, or else the water and character of the bottom did not afford a view, for no trace of the sunken boat was discovered.

“Dad’s going to try to get another,” Jack had said, as he and his chums called at Camp Taylor one day, to express formal thanks for their rescue.

“What made you go out so far in the storm?” asked the Scout Master.

“Oh, just for fun,” Sam answered. It was really the only reply that could be made.

As may readily be supposed, the saving of Jack and his chums from the lake brought about a more friendly feeling between the boys of the two camps, but though Rick tried to forget what Jack had done to Ruddy, he could not get out of his mind the memory of the kicks and the thrown stone.

“I wouldn’t trust my dog with him alone—never!” decided Rick to himself.

Taking advantage of the better acquaintance and more friendly feeling, the Scout Master one day decided to ask Mr. Slade about the mysterious cave. He wanted to find out who owned it, and why the owner seemed to object to any one venturing in.

“I’ll see if I can’t get permission for us to explore it,” said Mr. Taylor to Rick and the other boys. “Mr. Slade owns land in this vicin-

ity, and he may know who owns the cave. It would seem to be an interesting place to visit."

"I wish we could go all through it," said Tom.

"Maybe there's an underground river or lake in it," suggested Hen.

"And maybe an old hermit lives there," added Chot. "Maybe that's who hollered at us."

Rick thought it strange that a "hermit" would wear such up-to-date garments as golf knickerbockers, but the lad said nothing of his suspicions.

"You boys stay around camp—that is, don't go too far away," said Mr. Taylor. "I'll go over and see Mr. Slade and ask him about the cave."

While some of the lads went fishing, in a little cove not very far distant from camp, others donned their swimming garments, and a few mended, as best they could, some rents in their clothes, or sewed on dangling and missing buttons.

Rick and his three particular chums, with Ruddy, of course, decided on a little trip of their own. There had been talk in camp of

holding a sort of athletic meet, of which one of the numbers would be a pole-vaulting contest. As there were no suitable long poles to be cut in the vicinity of the tents, Rick proposed that they look deeper in the woods for them.

So, in accordance with this determination, he and his chums set out in the opposite direction from that taken by Mr. Taylor, who went to interview Mr. Slade about the mysterious cave.

But poles of the kind Rick and the other boys wanted were not so easily come upon, and they wandered farther away than they intended. However, they had a compass and did not imagine they would lose their way.

However, that is just what happened, though the boys did not realize it for some little time. It was not until the shadows began to lengthen, and they had secured only two of the four poles they needed, that Rick, looking around, said:

“We’d better be getting back, fellows!”

“That’s right!” agreed Chot. “We can come out again to-morrow.”

But when they turned, to retrace their steps, as they thought, they realized that they had gotten on a strange trail. And, as usual, there

was a difference of opinion as to the right way back to camp.

They went some distance in one direction, and then tried another, Ruddy running along sometimes in advance and sometimes lagging behind. He was not at all worried, as the boys were beginning to be.

It was during one of the periods when Ruddy was absent, prospecting by himself in some underbrush, that Chot called:

“Maybe your dog knows the way back, Rick.”

“Sure, I guess he does,” Rick answered. “I never thought of that. I’ll tell him to go home—which means camp now—and we’ll follow him. Here, Ruddy! Ruddy!” he called.

There was a crackling and rustling in the underbrush, as though the dog were approaching, and the next instant there burst into the clearing where the boys stood two tawny and yellowish spotted animals, with fierce eyes, and slightly tufted ears. With snarls of rage the beasts sprang forward as Rick cried:

“Wildcats! Wildcats, fellows! Take to a tree!”

Without a moment of hesitation he sprang

for the nearest, an example followed by his chums, and not a moment too soon, for the foremost of the wildcats made a savage snap at Chot's feet as that lad pulled them up out of reach, climbing the tree he had selected.

CHAPTER XX

A MISSING DOG

WITH savage snarls and growls of rage the two wildcats, baffled for the moment in their attacks on the boys, drew away and seemed to be plotting together as they stood in the midst of the little clearing looking at the treed Scouts. At least the wildcats appeared to be consulting, for they put their heads together and then turned their baleful yellow eyes on Rick and his chums.

With wildly-beating hearts the lads held their positions in the trees, climbing up higher after they had managed to catch their breaths following the first excited leap for safety.

“Where did they come from?” called Chot, who was next to Rick, each in a tree of his own, while Tom and Hen had picked out one to share between them.

“They must have their den around here some-

where," remarked Tom. "They came out all of a sudden, as if we'd gone too close to their young ones."

"I believe we did," asserted Rick. "Otherwise they wouldn't have come out at us the way they did."

"Oh, I guess wildcats are savage enough to do that," declared Hen. "Say, they're fierce all right! Look out! Here they come!"

"Break off a club and bang 'em over the head if they climb up!" advised Tom, suiting his action to the words.

The two wildcats, bobcats or bay lynxes, by which various names they are known, seemed made more savage than before, at hearing the sounds of the boys' voices. With louder growls and snarls of rage the tawny beasts, one selecting the tree which held Rick, and the other the tree up which Tom and Hen had climbed, began an ascent, their sharp claws tearing off bits of bark.

"Get a club, Rick!" called Chot, from his tree.

"Guess I'll have to," asserted Ruddy's master. "Where's my dog, anyhow?"

There was no trace of the setter, and for an

instant Rick had a strange feeling about his heart as he realized that the bobcats might have killed faithful Ruddy.

Up scrambled the two fierce beasts, for a wildcat is a synonym for fighting ability, and you have but to recall the frontier days, when a man was accounted the acme of aggression if he could "fight his weight in wildcats."

The wildcats which had treed Rick and his chums were not as large as the Canadian lynx, but matched it in cunning and fierceness. The ear tufts were not as large and the color was a deeper yellow, in many cases with more conspicuous black spots underneath.

Wildcats do not generally weigh more than thirty pounds, even the largest, but with that weight, were they as fierce as some story books assert, they would be awkward customers to meet in the woods.

However, most wildcats are shy, and only venture out at night, when they are sufficiently destructive to poultry and even lambs, to make them a menace to farmers.

Wildcats are excellent tree climbers, though, as a matter of fact, they spend most of their time on the ground, stalking rabbits, chipmunks

and squirrels, probably venturing into trees after the two latter classes of prey. The bobcat also catches ground-frequenting birds, such as quail.

Though ordinarily hunters and campers in the woods have nothing to fear from wildcats, there are exceptions to this general rule, as Rick and his chums found. And, as it developed later, they had unintentionally disturbed, or come too near, the den of a pair of the bobcats which were rearing their young in a cave-like hollow.

It was this anxiety for their young that had made these cats so aggressive, so that they actually obliged the Scouts to take to trees. Perhaps if Rick and his chums had boldly faced the pair of tawny brutes, and had used clubs, they might have driven them off. But the first instinct of the boys was to leap up trees, and, very likely, this was the safest course under the circumstances.

And so it was by a combination of circumstances that Rick and his chums thus found themselves treed as night was coming on. They were some distance from camp, they did not

know the path back, Ruddy was not in evidence and the wildcats were climbing up after the boys. A bad combination!

“Get down, you yellow imp!” cried Rick, trying by the fierce tones of his voice to instill courage into his own heart. “Take that!”

He had broken off a heavy piece of a branch from near where he was perched in the tree, and as the cat climbed up, spitting and snarling, the Scout brought the club down as hard as he could on the head of the beast.

But the wood was rotten, a fact of which Rick was not aware, and it broke without having inflicted much damage on the wildcat.

With another snarl of rage the tawny creature scrambled up closer to Rick, who, in an excess of fear, grasped a limb above him with both hands.

“Kick him, Rick! Kick him!” cried Chot, seeing which way the battle was likely to go. “Kick him in the snoot!”

And kick Rick did, with both feet, to such good purpose that he turned aside the attack of the snapping jaws with their rows of sharp teeth.

The wildcat lost its grip and an instant later half fell, half scrambled down the tree trunk to the ground.

“Good work, Rick!” shouted Chot. In the gathering dusk he noticed a look of pain on his chum’s face.

“Did he nip you?” Chot asked.

“A little—on my foot,” Rick answered. “He bit right through my shoe!” And the wildcat had done just that, the tough leather seeming to offer little resistance.

Meanwhile Tom and Hen were having a fight with the cat that had started to climb their tree, but the two boys had managed to break off clubs of sound wood and as the head of the beast came within reach they banged away with all the energy they could bring to bear.

The result was that the wildcat had really no chance. He was so fiercely beaten that, with a howl of dismay, he turned and slid down the tree more quickly than he had climbed up.

Thus the two bobcats were vanquished in the first round of fighting, so to speak. But they were far from being knocked out. Growling and spitting, almost as does the house cat when attacked by a dog, the two tawny creatures

seemed to hold another council of war together in the darkening clearing at the foot of the trees.

“They’re coming up again!” yelled Rick as he saw one of the cats approaching his tree.

“Get a better club,” advised Chot. “I’ve got one if I could throw it to you.”

“Better keep it for yourself,” Rick advised.

And then, suddenly from the fast-gathering darkness of the woods rang out a bark.

“Ruddy!” cried Rick. “Here comes my dog!”

And indeed the setter, having winded the pungent smell of the wildcats, had turned from a peaceful trailing of a rabbit and come to the rescue.

Ordinarily a setter is not a fierce dog, being of too gentle a disposition. But even a poodle, I suppose, may turn and attack an enemy of his master, and this is what Ruddy did. Savagely barking, and with eyes fairly blazing to add weight to his other arguments, the red setter leaped to the attack.

The wildcats, which had started again to ascend the trees, turned at the approach of this new enemy. Without a moment of hesitation,

Ruddy sprang in and nipped one of the beasts on the flank. The lynx turned like a flash, out shot a paw armed with savage claws, and Ruddy sprang away with a howl of pain. He received some severe scratches from the razor-like claws, it developed later.

Nothing daunted, however, Ruddy sprang for the other beast, but he did not get a chance to bite, for the wildcat turned and ran. However, its mate, with a savage snarl, jumped for Ruddy and it might have fared ill with the dog had not Rick scrambled down the tree and leaped to aid his pet. Disregarding all danger to himself, the boy caught up a heavy piece of branch and, running up, dealt the remaining cat a blow across the back, just as it was about to leap on Ruddy.

“Come on, fellows!” shouted Chot, scrambling down from his tree. “We’ve got ’em on the run!”

Ruddy, encouraged by the presence of his master, again jumped forward and got in a substantial bite on the other flank of the yellow creature, drawing blood. And this, with Rick’s attack, was too much for the lynx. With a howl and snarl it turned and a moment later

neither of the two was in sight. Hen and Tom climbed down to join their chums, and Ruddy, eager to be revenged for the slashes he had received, plunged into the bushes.

“Come back! Come back!” yelled Rick. “They’ll tear you to pieces! Come back!”

Reluctantly Ruddy obeyed, but he continued to bark and growl, and the hair along his spine rose up in a little ridge as he turned and faced the place where the bushes had closed on the wildcats.

“We’d better be getting out of here,” said Chot.

“I guess so,” agreed Rick. “They may bring back the whole family of bobcats!”

“I didn’t know any were in these woods,” said Tom.

“We know it now,” added Hen grimly. “Let’s go—but which way?”

It was the question which had worried the boys before the advent of the bobcats.

“Let’s leave it to Ruddy—I’ve done it before, when I was lost,” suggested Rick, and this was done. “Home, Ruddy!” commanded the lad, and, pausing in his first aid work of licking his cuts with his tongue (a dog’s most reliable

medical agent) Ruddy started off through the woods, over which darkness was rapidly falling. The boys followed.

Very much excited, and yet feeling that they had come out of the affair with credit, thanks to Ruddy, Rick and his chums tramped on. And it was not long before they heard shouts which, answering, they learned came from their camp comrades and the Scout Master who had set out in search of them.

“Got lost, did you?” asked Mr. Taylor, when they were back in camp. “Did you forget your woodlore?”

“I guess the wildcats scared it out of us,” laughed Chot.

“Wildcats,” mused the Scout Master. “They’re not dangerous ordinarily, but you must have been too near their den of young. We’ll have a look around there.”

This was done a few days later, Ruddy’s scratches having partly healed meanwhile, and Rick’s having been found to be slight. And though the den was deserted, the location was found and a hunter, encountered by the Scouts, said he had a glimpse of the family of wildcats moving to a new location.

The adventure that befell Rick and his chums and dog made the other Scout campers long for something of the same sort to happen to them, and several parties strayed so far from camp—though none was actually lost—that Mr. Taylor had to forbid this inviting of dangerous happenings.

The summer days were passing, each one a source of joy in itself, and the whole season a complete delight, even with occasional storms. Mr. Taylor's plan of asking Mr. Slade about the mysterious cave could not be carried out, as the latter left camp soon after the sinking of the motor boat, and his sister did not know when he would return. He was away on business, she said. Mr. Taylor did not like to ask her about the cave, and he was thinking of appealing to some of the old residents of the locality when a series of events happened which eventually solved the whole affair.

Rick and his three particular chums had been off fishing one day, and were returning rather late, but with good strings to their credit, when Rick stopped to call Ruddy.

“Here, boy!” he shouted, but there was no answering bark. Several times that day the

setter had lagged behind, and Rick had been obliged to go back after him. This time, in spite of calls and whistles, Ruddy did not come racing along.

“I’ve got to get him,” Rick said to his chums. “He’s getting too wild. He may trail those bobcats and be clawed all to pieces. You fellows go on. I can find my way back to camp after I get Ruddy.”

Chot and the others agreed to wait, or even go back with Rick to look for the missing dog, but Rick would not allow this.

“You go on—I’ll follow,” he said. “I guess Ruddy isn’t far back.”

CHAPTER XXI

ETHEL IS LOST

“**W**HERE you fellows been?” demanded Dick Runyon as he saw Tom, Chot and Hen entering camp by the trail from the Fishing Hole.

“We been waiting for you,” added Luke Borden.

“What’s the matter?” asked Chot. “What’s up? Can’t you see where we’ve been?” and proudly he held up his string of fish.

“Well, you’re just in time,” went on Dick. “Oh, boy! It’s great!”

“For the love of apple dumplings, what is it?” asked Tom. “Have they discovered gold in the cave?”

“Or found out who it was that spoiled our clambake?” Hen wanted to know.

“It’s something good to eat!” guessed Chot.

“Right you are!” sung out Dick. “Roasting

ears of corn! A farmer brought 'em to Mr. Taylor, and we're going to build fires and have 'em roasted for supper."

"Great!" exclaimed Tom. "That's sure good news!"

"Where's Rick and Ruddy?" asked Luke, for the boy and dog were seldom seen separately.

"Rick's coming," answered Chot. "Ruddy got on the trail of a rabbit or something and hung back. Rick's gone after him."

Mr. Taylor came up in time to hear this explanation and nodded understandingly.

"Clean your fish, boys," he advised, for that was one of the rules of camp. "You had dandy luck! Then we'll have grub. There are enough roasting ears for all to have enough. I hope Rick isn't going to be late."

"He'll be right along," said Chot. "Especially if he smells grub."

But when the fish had been cleaned, and some prepared to be fried for supper, and when the roasting ears were ready to be put near the embers, Rick had not arrived.

"Well," observed the Scout Master, looking at his watch and then taking an observation of

the fast-setting sun, "we won't wait for him. He must take 'pot-luck,' though there'll be plenty left for him. He should not be late, though I can understand why he didn't want to come in without his dog. Get ready for grub, fellows!"

Mr. Taylor had taught the Scouts some of the simpler fundamentals of cooking over a camp fire, and they could also get up meals by using the oil stove, which was the more practical method, however picturesque and poetical a Gypsy kettle seems.

It is, however, not much of a trick to cook over an open fire if you observe a few simple rules. Construct a sort of fireplace with stones placed upright to shelter the blaze and make a primitive stove, over which pots and pans may be set. If the opening between the three upright stones (one at the back and two at the sides) is too large to be spanned by small pans, put some iron rods, an old stove oven-grate or even some wire or iron barrel hoops across the opening. You can broil a steak on this wire, or iron grill, if you have no broiler.

If you have to build an open fire in a storm, slant over it, from the rear, a sheet of tin, no

matter how old and battered. This will keep the fire from being drowned by the rain, and will also keep the water or snowflakes out of whatever you are cooking if you have no pot or pan covers.

So the Boy Scouts of Camp Taylor cooked their evening meal, especially the roasting ears of corn, over an open fire, waiting until the embers were cherry red and hot, thus throwing out no smoke.

“Oh, boy!” cried Chot, as he buttered his roast corn ear and bit into it, using due caution on account of the heat.

“Best I ever tasted!” mumbled Tom.

“I wish I could always live in camp,” sighed Hen.

“’Tisn’t so much fun in winter, is it, Mr. Taylor?” asked Chot.

“Well, that depends on how you look at it,” the Scout Master answered. “I’ve been in some winter camps that I enjoyed very much, and though it was cold we didn’t seem to mind it. Of course you can’t do any motor boating, but there is skating and sledding to make up for it.”

“And fishing through the ice!” exclaimed Tom. “How about that?”

“That is sport, too, but not very exciting sport,” admitted the Scout Master. “Just sitting waiting for a pickerel to ring the bell, or jerk the red flag, isn’t very exciting. But of course if you’re fishing for fish to eat you can get along without excitement. And you surely have appetites in a winter camp!”

“Let’s go some day,” proposed Chot, reaching for another roasted ear.

“Sure!” came a chorus of assents.

“Not until we finish this, though,” stipulated Hen. “This is too good to miss! It’s too bad Rick can’t have some!”

“Yes,” agreed the Scout Master. “I wish he’d come along. As soon as any of you have finished I wish you’d go a little way back along the trail and give him a shout. He may not realize how late it is getting.”

“He would if he was as hungry as I was!” declared Chot.

He and Tom finished a little later—that is they were filled for the time being, though they reserved the right to eat more later if they so desired. And then Tom and Chot started down the path on which they had left Rick turning back to seek his missing dog.

“Hi, Rick!” called Chot, and they paused, waiting for an answer. But none came, save the echoes of his own voice.

“Ho, Ruddy!” called Tom.

Again the echoes were the only replies.

The two boys walked back, perhaps a quarter of a mile, calling at intervals, but with no success.

“Ruddy must have run away,” suggested Tom.

“Looks so,” admitted Chot. “And Rick wouldn’t be satisfied until he found him.”

“I guess we wouldn’t either, if we had a dog like that,” said Tom.

“That’s right,” assented his chum.

The boys were anxious now, for it was getting dusk, and there was neither sight nor sound of Rick or Ruddy.

“We’ll go to the top of the next hill,” stipulated Chot, though they had, some time since, passed the place where they had left Rick. “If we can’t see him—or hear him or Ruddy from there—we’ll go back to camp.”

“I guess if he isn’t back then, we’ll all have to start out and hunt him,” said Tom.

“How could he get back? We haven’t met him!”

“He might have gone around some other way.”

“That’s so. Well, we’ll give a good shout when we get to the top of the next hill.”

However, shout and call as Tom and Chot did, there was neither yell of boy nor bark of dog in answer, and, waiting a little while, the two searchers returned to camp.

As they approached the tents in the clearing they saw a group of their chums gathered about the Scout Master and another man. There seemed to be some excitement.

“Who’s that?” asked Chot, evidently referring to the strange man. It was getting on toward night now, and they could not see distinctly.

“Looks like Mr. Slade,” said Tom.

“It is,” agreed Chot, as they drew nearer and had a better view. “I wonder if anything has happened?”

Their approach was unnoticed, and the attention of the two lads was divided between finding out the cause of the visit of Mr. Slade

and looking to see if Rick and Ruddy had returned by some other trail. The last had evidently not taken place, however, for neither boy nor dog was in sight.

Mr. Taylor and Mr. Slade were talking earnestly as Tom and Chot approached, their advance being heralded by several of their chums.

“Did you find him?” asked the Scout Master, wheeling about.

“No,” answered Chot. “We called and called, but he didn’t answer.”

“Who is missing?” asked Mr. Slade.

“Rick Dalton and his dog Ruddy,” answered the Scout Master. “However, I do not believe it will amount to anything. The boys were coming back from fishing and Ruddy lagged. Rick just went back to make him come along. But I wish he wouldn’t delay so. He has missed his supper. However, that needn’t interfere with us helping you, Mr. Slade. We’ll get up a party at once.”

“And I’ll send Jack and his two chums over,” added the other man. “They’ll put themselves under your instructions, Mr. Taylor, though neither of them is a Scout.”

“Oh, that’s all right,” said the Master with a genial smile. “They don’t have to belong to the Scouts.”

“I’m going to see that they join—at least my boy will—after we get back home,” went on the man. “But I do hope you can find her, for she never has stayed out as late as this before, especially when alone.”

“Who else is gone?” asked Chot.

“Ethel Slade,” answered Mr. Taylor. “Her father just came over to ask us to help look for her. She went out to gather some wild flowers, and her aunt saw her, a little while before supper, on the side hill. But she hasn’t come home. We’ll go and find her.”

“Sure!” agreed the boys.

“I hope nothing has happened,” spoke her father. “Ethel is subject to spells of sightlessness, and one of these may have come upon her. That’s why we never want her to go off by herself. But she has seemed so well, since coming here to camp, that her aunt and I both thought that the spells would pass. My poor little girl! I hope she is all right!” he said, with a catch in his voice.

“Oh, we’ll find her!” declared Mr. Taylor.

“Why, Rick may have met her in the woods, and be leading her home. He’d have to go slowly if she were unable to see. I think we’ll find them both all right, Mr. Slade.”

“I’m sure I hope so,” was the comment of Ethel’s father. “Night is coming on, and there are so many dangerous places—the wildcats may attack her——”

“Oh, don’t say that!” cried a woman’s voice and out of the gloom came walking Ethel’s Aunt Irma. “I can’t bear to hear you say that!” she went on. “It’s bad enough to have her missing, without suggesting wildcats!”

“I don’t believe you’ll find any of those beasts so near the camps as Ethel must be,” said the Scout Master. “We’ll probably locate her in a little while. Let’s get ready for a night search, fellows!”

His brisk, cheery manner seemed to hearten Mr. Slade and his sister.

“It’s so good to have the Boy Scouts to depend on,” said Aunt Irma.

“We’ll have your nephew and his chums, too,” suggested Mr. Taylor, wishing to have the other lads get some credit.

“I’ll go tell them to hurry and join you,” offered Mr. Slade.

As he started from the Scout camp, with his sister, to go to his own, there arose on the evening air a weird, shrill cry. It smote the silence suddenly, and caused more than one to start in nameless fear.

“What—what was that?” whispered Miss Slade.

“Sounded like a wildcat,” answered Chot, before he realized what he was saying.

CHAPTER XXII

THE DISMAL CAVERN

RICK DALTON, with his string of fish, having turned aside from his chums, to go back on the trail and get his dog Ruddy, walked slowly through the beautiful woods. Somewhere in the distance a loud-voiced crow gave utterance to:

“Haw! Haw! Haw!”

That is what crows really say, rather than “Caw!” Rick knew, for at home he had a tame crow “Haw Haw” by name, which black bird he and Ruddy had found injured in the woods the summer before.

“I sorter wish I had Haw Haw here with me,” mused Rick, as he walked along kicking aside the dried leaves. “He could whistle for Ruddy better than I can.”

Rick had taught his crow to whistle, and, for a time Haw Haw had all the dogs in Belemere

chasing around looking for their masters, whose clarion calls the bird so cleverly imitated.

“Yes, if I had Haw Haw I could get him to whistle Ruddy back to me,” mused Rick. “But as long as he isn’t here I’ll have to do it myself.”

He put two of his fingers in his mouth, and sent forth a shrill, piercing blast which, it seemed, no dog could hear and resist. But Ruddy was either too far off to hear it, or else he decided to ignore the summons for the time being, a bad habit the setter had on occasions.

“Here, Ruddy! Ruddy!” called Rick, but there was no answering bark. And it was these summoning calls, on the part of Rick, that his chums, Tom, Hen and Chot, heard as they left him and made their way to camp.

“Well, I guess you’re going to make me go all the way back to the fishing hole after you,” said Rick to himself, having waited a little while after his last whistle and call. “You’re a good dog, Ruddy, but you do play the queerest tricks sometimes!”

Yet, in spite of this, Rick could not help loving Ruddy, and he wished his dog were there with him now, with all his faults, that he might

look into the clear, loving, brown eyes of the animal; that he might slip his arm around Ruddy's neck and fondle the long, silky ears.

"This is the best summer I've ever had, or Ruddy either, I guess," mused Rick, as he thought of the joys of camp life—joys present and to come. "I'd like to find out about that cave, though," the lad said half aloud. "There sure is something queer about it."

And, as he tramped along, he began to think that there was something queer, also, about the continued absence of Ruddy. Seldom before, on fishing or other boyish expeditions, had the setter absented himself so long. Often Ruddy would race off after a rabbit, real or imaginary, but eventually he came back of his own accord, or because of the commanding voice or whistle of his master.

"Something sure is wrong!" said Rick, half aloud. "I wonder if Jack, or any of those other fellows, could have caught Ruddy——"

He did not want to say what he thought.

"Oh, they couldn't be mean to him after what he did—jumping in and pulling out Sam Small when the motorboat sank," Ruddy went on.

“Besides Sid and Sam aren’t as mean as Jack is toward dogs. I wonder what makes him hate ’em so—especially Ruddy?”

Thinking on this subject, wondering if he and his chums would ever get to the bottom of the mystery of the phosphorus face in the mysterious cave, and beginning to realize that it was getting late, and that he would soon be expected back at camp, Rick trudged on.

“It wouldn’t be much of a joke if I got lost now, all by myself,” thought the boy. “Still, I’ve got some matches, and I could cook these fish if I had to. And I guess I’ve got a little lunch left.”

Rick opened the knapsack which was slung over his shoulder. He and his chums had taken a “snack” with them on their fishing trip, and now the lad was glad to find that he had something left—some bread and butter, a hard-boiled egg, salt and pepper and a cookie or two. He had packed up more than he had really needed. But the fishing was so good that none of the boys had spent much time on their lunch.

“I may need this. But if I don’t, Ruddy can eat it—if I can find him,” thought Rick.

And, as he tramped along, rustling among the

fallen leaves, he began to be really worried about his dog.

“Maybe he’s caught in a trap, like Sallie the cat was once,” mused Rick. “Or maybe he’s fallen into some hole, or cave. There’s a lot of them around here in these hills. Gosh! I wish I could find him!”

Rick looked about him. He had left the trail leading back to the fishing hole and had, somehow or other, branched off on a half-defined path that was not familiar to him. He was down in a sort of rocky defile, or gorge, and though he did not know his exact location, he was not at all alarmed for he felt sure he could find his way back to camp.

The gorge was a long one, winding in and out, and it had once been the bed of a stream of considerable size. Even now there was a brook running through the center, trickling over mossy stones. In the spring the melting snows turned this brook into a raging torrent.

“This is just the place where Ruddy would get on the trail of a rabbit or something,” thought Rick, as he looked along the lonely defile. “Guess I’ll follow it a ways. I’ve got time enough.”

He tried to look up at the sun, to judge how near setting time it was, but down in that rocky gash of the earth no sun was visible. It was dark and gloomy, but Rick was not afraid, for, somehow, he felt that Ruddy was near.

The boy paused and listened intently. The only sounds borne to his ears were the trickle of water in the rill, the wind among the trees and the distant flutter and call of unseen birds.

“Ruddy! Oh, Ruddy!” shouted Rick, loudly.

He paused to listen, but only the same half-muffled sounds came to him. There was no answering bark from his dog.

Again putting his fingers to his mouth, Rick sent forth that shrill, penetrating whistle. He listened again, but there was no quick pattering of feet which told that Ruddy was racing back to him.

“He sure did run off this time,” said the lad to himself. “Well, I’m not going back without him!”

Resolutely Rick set off along the trail of the gorge. Its rocky sides of shale and boulders rose higher and higher as he passed along, and the place became more and more gloomy as the unseen sun sank lower and lower in the west.

Up above, on the level, the beams might yet be visible. But they shone only for a small part of the day in this defile, and in certain sheltered spots, under overhanging rocks, snow had been known to last in this lonesome place until early July.

Rick had advanced more than a mile along the gorge, and he began to realize that he was a long way from camp when, just as he was about to whistle again, and call his dog, his attention was attracted by a rustling in the underbrush just ahead of him, and to his left. Instantly his eyes sought this spot, and he caught sight of the movement of some animal. The color seemed to be a deep yellow, and for a moment Rick thought he had come upon a den of wildcats.

He looked about for a club or stone to catch up as a weapon, and was about to drop his string of fish to secure a heavy stick, when the rustling became louder and out, as though from a hole in the side of the gorge, bounded—a dog!

“Ruddy! You gosh-hanged chump!” cried Rick in joyous condemnation of his pet. “You

old rascal! What in the name of jimpity jumping jacks did you want to run away for? Look what you made me do! Tramp all the way back here!"

It did not seem to worry Ruddy in the least. With a happy bark he sprang upon Rick, pretending to bite him, and almost knocking the lad down, so excited was the dog.

"Down! Down!" commanded Rick. "What's the matter with you, anyhow? Where you been?"

As if to answer, and show Rick just where he had been, Ruddy, with an inviting bark, ran back toward the tangle of bushes whence he had emerged a moment before. The dog paused before diving into the midst of the green foliage as though inviting Rick to follow.

"Come here, Ruddy!" commanded the boy.

The dog barked, and there was in that bark something which Rick at once understood. He had heard Ruddy utter it before. It was as though the dog had plainly said:

"Come here, Master! There is something you ought to look at!"

Rick understood at once. Not merely from

some idle whim would his dog stand there, looking back and wagging his tail so invitingly and entreatingly.

“What’s the matter? What’s the matter, old boy? Got something?” asked Rick, taking a fresh grip on his string of fish and walking toward his dog. “Maybe you’ve discovered a nest of wildcat kittens,” Rick went on. “If you have, we’re going to let ’em alone! I don’t fancy having the father and mother bobcat get after me here! Not much!”

Ruddy’s excitement increased as he saw his master approaching. The dog waited until Rick was almost at his side and then the intelligent animal made a dive through the bushes, and Rick saw that his pet had gone into a black hole, a cave-like opening in the side of the rocky hill. It was dark and forbidding but Ruddy never hesitated.

In he ran and then he turned and barked, the echoes of the place making the sound repeat itself in a weird manner. It was as though Ruddy said to Rick:

“Come on! Never mind the dark! Come on!”

And Rick, wondering what his dog had dis-

covered to make him act thus strangely, pressed on. He found himself in what was, evidently, the vestibule of a vast cavern, a cave under the hill. The entrance was so overgrown with vines and bushes that only a dog could have discovered it.

“Wait a minute, Ruddy! Come here!” cried Rick, fumbling in his pocket for his electric flash light. “Here!”

The dog came back, barking and obedient enough this time. He wanted Rick to advance farther, and to bring that about Ruddy knew he must act as guide.

As the rays from his small but powerful lamp illuminated the place where he stood, Rick saw that he was within a dismal cavern—very similar to the one he and the Boy Scouts had so unsuccessfully explored near their camp. The sides and roof, as well as the floor, were of solid rock, and Rick thought he could hear the trickle of water in the distance.

“What place is this, Ruddy?” asked Rick in a whisper, but his voice was so magnified by the echoes that it startled him by the loudness.

Ruddy barked again, with such energy that, multiplied as his tones were by the reverbera-

tions, several loose pieces of rock were brought clattering down.

A little shiver of fear passed over Rick.

“This is a good place to keep out of, unless you have a crowd with you,” thought the boy. And then his heart was set to thumping so rapidly that it almost choked him as, from somewhere in the gloom of the cavern, a voice cried:

“Ruddy! Ruddy! Where are you? Don’t leave me! Oh, Ruddy!”

CHAPTER XXIII

ON THE TRAIL

ETHEL SLADE'S Aunt Irma, who had come over to Camp Taylor to help her brother arrange for a searching party to take the trail after the missing girl, almost screamed when, following that weird cry, Chot Benson rashly suggested it might be a wildcat.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the Scout Master, giving Chot a nudge to tell him not to say anything more. "It's probably Rick coming back with his dog. He's always yelling and shouting."

This was true, in a measure, but this time it did not happen to be Rick or Ruddy. They were far away from camp.

"Oh, to think of poor Ethel, unable to see, out among the wild beasts!" cried her aunt. "It is terrible! Can't you do something?" she appealed to her brother.

"We're going to start out right away," he

answered. "I'm sorry we delayed so long, but I kept hoping she would come back."

"Do you think one of her blind spells has come over her?" asked Mr. Taylor.

"I'm afraid so," the father answered. "I'll go back with you, and hurry up Jack and his chums," he said to his sister. "But will you be afraid to stay in the cabin alone while we're out searching? We may be gone half the night."

"I'm going with you!" declared Miss Slade. "Yes, I am!" she insisted as Ethel's father shook his head. "You know I'm used to hiking, and I simply will *not* stay alone in the cabin! Don't be afraid," she said to the Scout Master, "I won't scream again, even if I do hear a wildcat."

"I don't believe you'll hear one," he said. "They aren't any more anxious to meet us than we are them. Besides, I think that was an owl."

"An owl making that horrible noise?" asked Miss Slade.

"A screech owl," said Chot, anxious to make amends for the first fright he had caused.

"I think I wouldn't be any more anxious to

meet one of them than I would a wildcat," said Ethel's aunt. "But let's get started. Let's do something!"

"Yes; every minute counts!" said her brother.

A little later Jack and his chums, the brother looking anxious and worried, joined the Boy Scouts, and presently with lanterns and flash lights they started off through the woods.

"We'll go in the direction Ethel was last seen traveling," suggested her father. "It may be possible to pick up her trail. If she found her sight temporarily leaving her she would stay in one place, I'm sure. I have told her always to do that."

"And if she is anywhere within hearing of our voices she will answer," said Miss Slade.

And so the two parties, combined, started out on the trail of the missing girl.

"What will Rick think if he comes back to camp and finds us all gone?" asked Tom.

"I'll leave a note on my tent pole," said the Scout Master, "telling him what has happened. I'll advise him to stay in camp. It will be useless for him to follow, perhaps to be lost. I can't understand what keeps him."

“Maybe something has happened to Ruddy,” suggested Chot.

“Say, you’re full of cheerful predictions to-night!” objected Hen. “Cut ’em out!”

“Guess I’d better,” agreed Chot. “But maybe we’ll meet Ruddy on the trail.”

“That’s more like it,” complimented Tom. “I hope we do!”

The note having been left in case Rick should return, which his chums fully expected him to do, the searchers started off, plunging into the now dark woods, their lights flashing like so many gigantic fireflies. And as they moved along they shouted and called at intervals.

“If we only had Ruddy here now he could trail Ethel, maybe,” said Chot to Tom.

“Maybe. I wonder where they are?”

And it was just about this same time that Rick had entered the dismal cavern, following Ruddy, and had heard the voice calling the name of his dog.

For a moment the boy was so startled that he could not think clearly, and he had a rash idea that what he had heard was but the echo of Ruddy’s barking, or his own calls, strangely

twisted by the echoes. But then again the cry came:

“Ruddy! Ruddy! Come to me! Where are you?”

“Ethel!” shouted Rick. “Ethel!”

“Oh, Rick! Rick! Is that you?” cried the girl. “Oh, I’m so glad! Now I’ll be all right. Can you find me? I’m lost in the dark, and I daren’t move for fear of falling. I’m in the cave—are you?”

“Yes,” Rick answered. “But I never was in this part before. Keep on calling so I can find you. Here, Ruddy!”

“Dear old Ruddy!” called Ethel. “It was he who found me! Oh, I was so glad! I thought you were with him, but you weren’t—at first. And then when Ruddy went away—Oh, I was so lonesome!”

“He came out to meet me,” Rick said, feeling rather strange at thus talking into the semi-darkness at a person whom he could not see. “He lagged behind and I went back after him, and it was only by chance that I found him. Now I’ve found you—pretty near, that is,” and Rick added the last because he wondered if he

could locate the girl there in the dark cave, with only his flash light to guide him.

“Follow Ruddy! He’ll lead you to me!” called Ethel.

“That’s so!” exclaimed Rick. “I almost forgot about him!”

He called to his dog, who was sniffing off in some dark nook, and the setter bounded to his side.

“Go find Ethel!” commanded Rick.

Ruddy barked and started off, the boy following as rapidly as he could, throwing the gleam of his electric torch ahead of him, and holding to his string of fish.

Ethel was farther in the cave than Rick had expected to find her, judging from the sound of her voice, but that was accounted for by the peculiar echoes. And at last, as he turned one of the many crooked passages in the cavern, Rick discovered the girl sitting on a ledge of rock, near a little running stream of water—an underground rill that trickled musically over the stones.

“Oh, Rick! I’m so glad!” cried Ethel, as she grasped his hand. “I—I can’t see again,” she added, with a quiver of her lips. “I got

blind all of a sudden after I'd been in this cave quite a little while."

"Did you come in here by yourself?" asked Rick.

"Yes. I was out for a walk, and then I happened to remember that you spoke of a cave where my handkerchief was found. I'd never been in it, and I thought maybe my father didn't want to tell me about it—I think this is his cave."

"I begin to believe so," said Rick. "At least one cave is, for I'm sure I saw him in it when we were ordered out. But you must have walked a long way before you found this place of getting in—through the rocky gorge."

"I didn't come in that way!" exclaimed Ethel in surprise, as Rick sat down near her. "I went in by the opening near our camp."

"Whew!" whistled Rick.

"What's the matter?" Ethel asked.

"This cave must be big—terrible big," answered Rick. "This part is miles from our camps!"

"I did walk a long ways," the girl said. "I had a flash lamp but it went out."

"Guess I'd better switch mine off," said

Rick, "or it won't last long. I need a new battery, anyhow."

"I was afraid when mine went out," said Ethel, "but I could see a little for there was a hole up through the roof of the cave. Then I stumbled and fell. I hit my head, and when I got up I couldn't see. My blindness had come again. I groped around and sat down here.

"Then, all of a sudden, I heard something moving and I screamed. A dog barked and Ruddy came up to me. Then I felt that you would come."

"I'm glad I did," said Rick, "but it was all accident. Ruddy sort of ran away, and he must have just happened to find this hole to get into the cave. But I'll lead you out."

"Please do," begged Ethel. "It's scary in here, even if I can't see. Oh, I do wish it would go away—my blindness," and there was a choking sob in her voice.

Rick patted her hand and Ruddy put his smooth tongue on the other.

"Dear old Ruddy!" murmured the girl, gently pulling his silken ears. "Now let's go, Rick."

She arose, holding out her hand, which act Rick saw as he flashed on his light again. Then he started to lead her back the way he had come in.

As he neared the opening by which he and Ruddy had entered, recognizing by his electric torch some marks along the underground trail, Rick heard a noise outside.

“What is it?” asked Ethel.

“Sounds like rain,” the boy answered. And when he reached the opening in the rocky side of the defile (one of the several entrances to the mysterious cave), Rick found that a heavy rain was falling outside, and that pitch black night had come.

“Um!” Rick murmured. “No use taking you out in this, Ethel. You don’t mind staying in here where it’s dry, do you?”

“Not if you and Ruddy stay.”

“Of course we’ll stay. They’ll probably start out from camp looking for us in a little while. We’ll just stay here. It isn’t so bad. It’s warm and dry.”

“It would be real nice if I could see, and if we had something to eat,” said Ethel.

“Eat!” cried Rick joyfully. “Why didn’t I think of it before? I can broil some fish and I’ve got a few sandwiches and cookies!”

“Oh, goodie!” exclaimed Ethel, now almost her happy self again.

“Wait here and I’ll get some dry sticks and make a fire,” Rick told the girl. “We’ll camp right here.”

There was a quantity of dry drift wood, deposited by some freshet, just inside the entrance to the cave, and with these pieces the Boy Scout soon had started a merry blaze.

“I can feel it, even if I can’t see it,” said Ethel, holding out her hands to the flames.

Rick found where the underground stream ran to within a short distance of the mouth of the cavern, and there he cleaned and washed some of the fish. Cutting off some choice portions, he broiled them by holding them in front of the fire, suspended on a piece of wire he carried in his pocket for making fish snares.

“Here’s a piece of board for a plate,” he told Ethel, placing it in her hands, after he had laid on it a slice of broiled fish. “Shall I feed you? You’ll have to use your fingers for knife and fork.”

“Oh, I can do that, and feed myself as long as I know things are in front of me,” she said.

“I’ll salt and pepper your fish for you,” offered Rick, for in his knapsack were these condiments which he and several of the Scouts carried, as they often cooked their fish at an open fire in the woods.

“Oh, how good it is!” cried Ethel as she ate in the cave beside the cheerful fire, which she could hear the crackle of, if she could not see. “Now everything is all right!”

“We may have to stay here all night,” said Rick. “I don’t believe, even if the rain stops, that I’d dare try to lead you out through the gorge.”

“I don’t mind staying—do we, Ruddy?” murmured Ethel, and the dog who had shared in the supper Rick prepared, whined contentedly in answer.

The rain kept up, but the refugees were safe in the cave. Rick insisted on taking off his coat and wrapping it about Ethel who had on a thin dress, and he persisted in this in spite of her objections. The hours passed, and Rick and Ethel must have dozed off by the warm

fire when suddenly Ruddy roused up and barked.

“What’s that?” cried Ethel, starting up. Then she added: “Oh, Rick! I can see! I can see the fire—and you and Ruddy! But what made him bark?”

“He heard something, I guess,” Rick answered, himself hardly awake as yet. “Lie down, Ruddy!” he commanded.

But the dog growled and barked again, and then, off in the distance could be heard confused noises. Voices were shouting and calling, and above the clamor a name was called:

“Ethel! Ethel!”

“Oh, Daddy! Here I am! Here I am!” she answered. “And Rick and Ruddy are with me!”

CHAPTER XXIV

OUT OF DARKNESS

JOYOUS cries resounded through the dismal cavern as the searchers heard this answer to their call. For it was the advent of Mr. Slade, the Scout Master, Miss Slade and the boys. They had been on the trail for the better part of the night and finally, as a sort of last resort, had entered the cave, though not at the place where Rick and Ruddy had gone in.

“Ethel! Ethel! Are you all right?” cried her father, and then the girl and boy near the camp fire saw the flash of lanterns and electric torches.

“Yes, Rick and Ruddy took care of me,” Ethel Slade answered. “I lost my sight again, but I have it back now, and we had broiled fish. Ruddy found me first, and then Rick.”

“A very good combination, I should say!” laughed Mr. Slade, almost like one of the boys

now in his happiness. "I'll thank you and your dog later, Rick," he said, and he grasped the boy's hand in a grip that almost made Rick cry out with pain. But he bravely held back.

"Oh, you poor child!" murmured Aunt Irma.

"I had a lovely time, after Rick found me," said Ethel, "and now I can see! My eyes got better when I slept. They feel different, too, as if they were all well again."

"If only it could be true," murmured her father in a low voice.

"Well, this is luck, indeed, to find both lost ones, not to mention Ruddy!" said the Scout Master. "You're better off than we are," he added, "for we're dripping wet and you two are as dry as bones."

"Yes, the cave was a good shelter," Ethel said. "Are we going home now, Daddy? Back to camp?"

"Might as well, I guess. Most of us need dry things."

"But if I go out in the rain I'll get all wet," objected the girl, "and so will Rick and Ruddy."

"Oh, I don't mind!" Ruddy's young master hastened to say.

“There isn’t any need of getting very wet,” said Mr. Slade. “This cave of mine is a big one, and winds around under the hills. It has several entrances, I find—some I don’t know about myself. But we can walk back to the main one, which is near our cabin, and then we’ll have only a little distance to go in the storm.”

“Then this is your cave?” questioned the Scout Master of Mr. Slade, while Aunt Irma wrapped around Ethel a cloak she had brought, giving Rick back his coat.

“Yes, I bought it some time ago,” was the answer, “but the fact that there is a big cave around here isn’t generally known. I kept it as secret as I could because of something of value here.”

“Gold?” cried Chot.

“Diamonds?” gasped Hen.

“Neither one,” laughed Mr. Slade. “It is a rock crystal formation that can be used to make grinding and polishing wheels. I accidentally discovered these crystals while prospecting in the cave one day, after I had bought it for another purpose. Since then I have had to keep the matter secret, as some other men were try-

ing to get possession of the cavern and make use of the crystals. But now I have everything safe, and I don't care who knows about the cave, or who comes in it. I'll show you the crystals, or some of them, when we go back."

Rick's smoldering fire was extinguished and then he, with Ethel and Ruddy, followed the rescue party back to the main entrance—the one by which the boys had first made their acquaintance with the cavern.

"Here are some of the crystals," said Mr. Slade, pausing to flash, into a sort of side cavern, the lantern he carried. The gleams were reflected back a million fold in the brilliant rock formations.

"There's a gun!" exclaimed Rick, catching sight of a weapon standing up against the rocky wall.

"Did some one try to come in and take the crystals away, Dad?" asked Jack. "Did you have to stand 'em off?"

"No, not exactly," his father answered. "You see, even Jack does not know all the secrets of the cave, though he has been in it several times," he remarked to the Scout Mas-

ter. "I discovered that by firing the gun in the cave the vibrations brought down from the high, vaulted roof large quantities of the crystals, and I used that plan in getting some for experimenting. It was my form of blasting."

The Boy Scouts nodded understandingly. This accounted for the thunderous noises they had heard once, after being ordered from the cave on an occasion.

"I regretted asking you to leave," said Mr. Slade, "but I dared take no chances on having my secret discovered, since I had not yet obtained complete and legal possession of the cave. But now everything is all right. We shall start digging out the rock crystals soon, and I hope some may even prove to be of value for other purposes than grinding and polishing wheels."

Mr. Slade told more about the cave, how he had discovered it by accident while camping in that locality, and how he had bought it in secret. He admitted that it was he whose voice the boys heard coming up from the hole in the ground that time.

"I was down there," said Ethel's father,

“and I noticed that the least vibrations, even those of my footsteps, caused crystals to fall from the roof. I reasoned that a louder noise might cause more to fall, so I gave some shouts.”

“Did you call ‘gold! gold!’?” asked Rick.

“No,” laughed Mr. Slade. “As I remember what I said was ‘old,’ for that word has a round, sonorous sound that makes many echoes. And it did bring down several crystals. I’m sorry I disappointed you lads.”

“I thought maybe it might have been gold or diamonds,” said Chot, with half a disappointed sigh.

Rick told of having found Ethel’s handkerchief in the cave, or, rather, of Ruddy’s act in bringing it to him.

“I think I must have dropped it,” said Mr. Slade. “I don’t remember picking it up with some of mine, but I do remember, afterward, that my pocket smelled of perfume, which I recognized as some scent Ethel had. At any rate, I think that clears up all the mysteries of the cavern.”

“What a wonderful cave!” murmured Ethel, as they walked through it. And then, suddenly,

as they turned down another corridor the girl shrank back close to her father's side.

"Look! Look!" she whispered. "The face of fire!"

And there, grinning at them, was the same grotesque countenance of flickering flames that Rick and his chums had first seen.

"Oh, that!" laughed Mr. Slade. "That was one of Jack's jokes!"

"Yes, I put it there," admitted Ethel's brother. "I heard dad say he wanted strangers kept out of the cave, and I drew the face on the wall with phosphorus."

"I had a quantity of phosphorus sent up to daub on the different parts of the cave wall, to indicate the proper turnings to take to get to the crystals," said Mr. Slade. "The phosphorus glowed in the dark and outlined my trail for me. But now I don't need it."

"That face sure scared us," admitted Rick. "But did you draw it over again, Jack? It faded out once."

"It fades in dry weather, and glows when it is damp, as it is now from the rainy mist that drifts into the cave," explained Mr. Slade. "I noticed that with the phosphorus markings I

used. But here we are at the entrance, and—why, it's stopped raining and the moon is out!" he exclaimed.

Then they emerged from the darkness of the cavern into the glorious silvery gleam of the full moon.

"Oh, how lovely!" murmured Ethel, gazing up at Luna sailing the sky like some dream-ship. "How glad I am that I can see. And my eyes feel so different! I fell and hit my head, Daddy, and then it got dark, but now I can see better than ever."

"The doctor predicted that some day a shock would restore your sight to normal," said Aunt Irma. "We must have the oculist examine you at once!"

Back to their separate camps went the two parties, though there was not much chance to sleep, for it was nearly morning.

The next day, when the Boy Scouts were hanging up their things to dry in the hot sun, Ethel and her father and aunt came along in the auto.

"I'm going to the city to have my eyes examined," said the girl to Rick and his chums. "But I just feel that they'll be all right now."

“I hope so,” murmured Rick, while Ruddy wagged his tail in a combined welcome and good-by, as he ran off to trail a scurrying rabbit.

“Are you coming back?” the Scout Master called after Mr. Slade.

“Oh, yes, we’re going to finish out our summer in camp. And I have to look after my cave crystals. We’ll see you again.”

Rick went off fishing by himself, his chums having been assigned to various tasks about camp. And as the boy and dog sat on the bank of a little cove, with a great tree towering over them, and the white tents of the camp behind them, Rick heard some one approaching.

He did not turn his head as, just then, he felt a nibble at his line. But as he pulled a big chub from the water he heard a voice saying:

“Will you be friends, Ruddy?”

And there, with his arms around the setter’s neck, was—Jack Slade!

Rick landed his fish on the grass with a thump and then, as he stood up, while Ruddy wagged his tail, and looked from one boy to the other, Jack held out his hand.

“I—I’ll never hurt Ruddy again,” said Jack,

and there was a catch in his voice. "I'm sorry I ever did. You see I was just rotten mean! But when I was little I was bitten by a dog, and ever since then I've been sort of afraid of 'em, and I've hit 'em and kicked 'em to make 'em keep away from me! But I'm all done with that now! I'm never going to kick or stone a dog again!"

"By gosh, I'm glad of that!" cried Rick, and the hands of the two boys met in a warm clasp of friendship, while the tail of dear old Ruddy almost wagged off!

"Jimminity! That's a dandy fish!" exclaimed Jack, admiringly, as he turned to look at Rick's catch.

"Pretty fair," acknowledged Rick. "Want to take my pole for awhile?"

"Don't you want it?"

"Nope! You can take it!"

Then Rick and Ruddy sat and watched Jack fish, and there was an understanding among the three such as had never been before, as Jack reached out one hand and patted Ruddy's head, while the dog's tail thumped the ground in perfect happiness.

Two days later Ethel and her father came

back to camp, and one look at the girl's shining face and sparkling eyes told the story.

"Oh, Rick!" she cried. "I'm never going to be left in the dark any more! Aren't you glad, Jack?"

"Glad? Say—Oh, gosh! Whoop!" and Jack's hat went sailing up in the air, while Ruddy raced after it, bringing it back with a joyous bark, which was an entreaty to throw it again.

"Why—why," said Ethel slowly, "Jack, are you—you and Ruddy——"

"Sure, we're friends!" cried the boy. "What you think? Hi, Ruddy! Go get it!" and he tossed a stick far out into the lake, the dog racing like mad to get it.

"Oh, I'm so glad! So glad!" murmured Ethel, and Rick knew what she meant.

Happy were the camping days that followed, for Sid and Sam, like Jack, became friends of the Scouts. Mr. Taylor was able to gratify his wish and explore the cave as much as he wished, and later Mr. Slade engaged the Scout Master to help get out the crystals.

At the close of the camping season Mr. Slade gave, in the large cavern, a big clambake to all

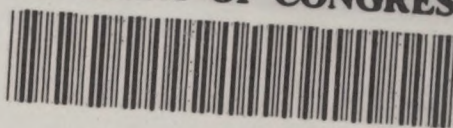
the boys, Ethel acting as hostess. Who had spoiled the bake of the Scouts was never discovered, though tramps were suspected.

And thus to a happy conclusion came the camping days of my boy hero and his dog. But it was not an end of their good times, by any means. And if you are sufficiently interested to follow further the affairs of the two friends, you may read of them in the next book of this series, to be called: "RICK AND RUDDY AFLOAT; The Cruise of a Boy and His Dog."

THE END

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